Contesting Secularism

Ashis Nandy and the Cultural Politics of Selfhood

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Abstract

This dissertation establishes that the methods used to generate social and political criticism are just as important as the ideas expressed. This proposition is explored in both the ideas and methods of the Indian political psychologist Ashis Nandy. For over thirty-five years Nandy has contributed extensively to a number of debates within a global academic culture, and as a public intellectual in India. His critique of Indian secularism has produced intense controversy, and is a dynamic case to explore this relationship between critique and method, and by extension the identity of the critic. This case study also allows for an analysis, of what is widely accepted, as the confronting features of his critique. In radically questioning the ways in which the ideology of secularism operates in Indian political culture, and in defining concepts of Indianness, Nandy contests dominant political ideas and ideals. Further, he confronts the role these ideas and ideals play in foreclosing understandings of national identity, national integration and Indian democracy. I argue that this confrontation demonstrates a critical and psychoanalytic engagement with the constituting features of Indian political culture, and political identities. This case study also provides a context to consider the implications of this approach for understanding and representing the identity of the critic.

Much criticism of Nandy and his work is based on beliefs that he represents the intellectual basis of anti-secularism and anti-modernism in India. According to these accounts Nandy carries forward a threatening and disruptive quality. This is evident, it is claimed, in his calls to return to a regressive traditionalism. These responses represent his ideas and his identity within a particular ideological and intellectual framework. This takes place though, at the expense of engaging with the methods operating in his work. The focus on the disruptive and threatening features of Nandy and his work creates a series of over-determined responses that undermine recognition of his psychoanalytic approach. I argue that the location of agitation and fascination for critics is in Nandy’s willingness to confront accepted identities, meanings, fantasies, projections and ideals operating in politics, and in working through the complexities of subjectivity. This aptitude for working with external and internal processes, at the border between culture and psyche is where the psychoanalytic focus of his work is
located. The psychoanalytic focus, in working with and working through the complexities of human subjectivity, produces a confronting self-reflexivity that can disarm critics. Nandy’s psychoanalytic reading of secularism is the starting point for theorising and characterising the method, or mode of critique operating across his work more broadly.

This dissertation argues that Nandy’s approach or method is characterised by a psychoanalytic mode. The psychoanalytic mode of engagement is illustrated in his capacity to generate critical analytic perspectives that rupture and regenerate subjectivity, including his own. This dissertation demonstrates Nandy’s psychoanalytic commitment, and argues the importance of this approach. Therefore, this reading of Nandy and the methods that are employed to develop this inquiry, build a case for the importance of psychoanalytic concepts, as a necessary interpretive mode for social and political criticism.
Declaration

This is to certify that,

I. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

II. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

III. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Christine Deftereos
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“There are possible ways of looking at the person
to which the modern world has few clues.
These possible ways cannot be explained away
as mystifications
or as
romantic invocations of the past.
Indeed, it is we who have been living
in a make-believe world
that ignores
other concepts
of the boundaries of the Self
and which
a huge proportion,
perhaps even a majority
of the world,
still lives.”

Ashis Nandy

“Freud, Modernity and Postcolonial Violence:
Analytic Attitude, Dissent and the Boundaries of the Self”
Chapter 1: Introduction
The Confronting Intellectual Destinations of Ashis Nandy: From the Symptomatic to the Psychotherapeutic

This dissertation explores the methods adopted in the work of the Indian political psychologist Ashis Nandy to generate social and political criticism. It theorises the relationship between ideas and method, and the implications this has for understanding and representing the identity of the critic. In exploring and characterising this relationship, the dissertation builds a case that the methods by which social and political criticism are generated are just as important as the arguments and ideas advanced. This proposition is explored using Nandy’s approach to social and political criticism, which I claim is defined by a psychoanalytic focus. More importantly, this psychoanalytic focus is already present in the voice of Nandy, the political psychologist, although these methods remain under theorised in existing accounts of Nandy and his work. I characterise and demonstrate this psychoanalytic focus or mode of critical engagement as that which enables him to generate critical analytic perspectives. In order to further understand the significance of Nandy’s approach, I draw on a number of existing psychoanalytic concepts to characterise this psychoanalytic mode of critical engagement, a mode that is central to his work and role as critic. In doing so the importance of these methods for social and political criticism is advanced.

1.1 Ashis Nandy as a Confronting and Contested Intellectual Figure

For over thirty-five years, Ashis Nandy has contributed extensively to a number of debates within a global academic culture and as a public intellectual in India. Notably his social and political criticism has contributed to critiquing Indian modernity, features of Indian political culture and political identities. This confronting subject matter, along with what are often regarded as Nandy’s outrageous ideas and perspectives, establish him as a highly contested figure. In the process Nandy’s ideas and methods, and the significance that can be attached to his identity as critic, have been radically called into question. Ziauddin Sardar describes Nandy’s presence in India as “bigger than most pop
stars. The significance of Nandy’s presence, along with his popularity is also evident in the number of responses and representations of him and his work. This secondary literature, however, also reflects the varied reception of Nandy’s work and intellectual significance within a number of debates. These representations vary from acknowledging Nandy as the founding voice of “modern Indian criticism,” to less celebratory accounts of an intellectual figure that is “unclassifiable.” The volume of secondary literature documenting this mixed reception is all the more arresting given that he is “not strictly an academic or professional scholar.” Based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi for over forty years, his involvement in intellectual life in India and more widely, nonetheless, remains widely acknowledged.

These issues of reception and representation are explored in this dissertation primarily through Nandy’s contributions to the debates on Indian secularism, and

1 For Sardar this appraisal of his “presence” is linked to Nandy’s commitment to an Indian knowledge community. Sardar emphasises Nandy’s commitment to retaining publishing rights to his work in India, and in being celebrated as one of the “three stars in India” in terms of the number of books he sells. See Ziauddin Sardar, “Why you can’t read these stars of India.” New Statesman, 126 (4320) (1997): 47. The historian Vinay Lal has also acknowledged the significance of Nandy’s presence in India and his commitment to publishing his work first within India. In Lal’s reading, such efforts cannot be dismissed as acts of “cultural nationalism,” but affirm Nandy’s contribution to “alternative information orders and knowledge systems.” See Vinay Lal, ed., Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures: The Multiple Selves and Strange Destinations of Ashis Nandy, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).


through what I establish is his distinct confrontation with the ideology of secularism. This provides a dynamic case study for exploring the relationship between ideas, critique and method and, by extension, identity and subjectivity. The confrontation that Nandy enters into in his critique of secularism allows for a detailed analysis of these relationships, as they are addressed in his work and identity as critic. Nandy summarises his confrontation with secularism in terms of the disjuncture that exists between the ideology of secularism instituted in the modern Indian state and peoples every day lived experiences. As he notes, “people have categories [of identification] and I do not see why those categories have to be reticent [or silenced in order] to accord the visions of secularism, when those [everyday] categories have served your purpose perfectly well…and what is so sacrosanct about the concept [of secularism]?” Central to Nandy’s confrontation then are the ways that the ideology of secularism forecloses existing everyday categories and processes of identification. His critique of secularism thus demonstrates the ways that the effects of this dominant political ideology truncate human subjectivity.

Nandy radically challenges the constitutive features of Indian political culture and political identities by confronting the sacrosanct features of the secular ideal. He questions the ideology of secularism in Indian political culture and in defining concepts of Indianness, thus contesting dominant political ideas and ideals. Further, he confronts the role these ideas and ideals play in foreclosing understandings of national identity,


6 Christine Deftereos, Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session IV (Unpublished Interviews, New Delhi, India, 2005): 23. As part of the research for this dissertation, I made two separate visits to India to meet with Ashis Nandy. On these trips taken in January – March 2005 and in December 2005 – February 2006, I met with Ashis Nandy on a number of occasions both formally and informally. The outcomes of these formal conversations conducted in India are four interviews which, along with a final interview conducted in Melbourne, Australia in December 2006, were digitally recorded and transcribed by Christine Deftereos as Conversations with Ashis Nandy. In addition to this, I had the opportunity to interview a number of scholars in India and in Melbourne. These efforts are collected as Conversations on Ashis Nandy. The result of these transcribed interviews feature in this analysis as another reference used to develop my argument about the analytic focus underpinning Nandy’s work and his identity. Informal conversations, discussion and comments made in confidence both by Ashis Nandy and others, particularly those who generously shared personal stories and anecdotes are not collated and referenced as part of the research materials.
national integration and Indian democracy. The controversy his critique generates is connected to the confronting features of his arguments and ideas but also to the confronting features of his approach and methods. I argue that the location of agitation and fascination for critics lies in Nandy’s willingness to confront the accepted identities, meanings, fantasies, projections and ideals operating in politics. This willingness to confront and work through the constitutive features of individual and collective identities is central to understanding the controversy attached to Nandy and his work. The psychoanalytic focus, in working with and working through the complexities of subjectivities and processes of identity formation, produces a confronting self-reflexivity that can disarm critics. It also notably provides the entry point for exploring and characterising these features of his work.

As Makarand Paranjape observes, “secular modernity, admittedly, becomes the number one enemy in most of Nandy’s work, bearing the brunt of much of his ire.” The intensity of his ire in confronting the operation of the secular ideal is demonstrated in the controversy his work produces. Don Miller argues, “Ever since the publication in 1985 of ‘An Anti-Secularist Manifesto’ – with that provocative title announcing a scandalous attack on the ideology of secularism in contemporary India, the knives have been out for Ashis Nandy.” In Miller’s analysis the consequences of Nandy’s scandalous confrontation result in Nandy becoming the “intimate enemy number one.” Nandy becomes the threatening and disruptive subject, and the source of much contestation and controversy. Nandy becomes subject to a series of over-determined responses and representations that ultimately function as a way of making over his identity as critic and the meanings associated with this, especially his intellectual significance. Consistent with these processes of re-making Nandy’s identity in threatening and disruptive terms, much criticism of him and his work does so by representing his intellectual commitment to anti-secularism and anti-modernism in India. Nandy’s identity is made over by taking on a series of additional threatening

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4 These representations of Nandy’s work and his identity are explored in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. See Chapter 4: Ashis Nandy as Phobic Object and Abjection: The Conceptual Battleground of Anti-Secularism and Culturalism. For a discussion of Nandy as the voice of anti-secularism and anti-modernism in India see Radhika Desai, “Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva,” Economic and Political Weekly, (20 March 1999): 695-712. Achin Vanaik,
meanings that become associated with him, including that he is, “spearheading the emerging culture of academic anti-secularism in India.”¹¹ The philosopher Akeel Bilgrami responds to Nandy’s threat and disruption by questioning his capacity to contribute to the debates on secularism. In Bilgrami’s account Nandy does not even get “to the terms of meaningful debate about secularism, but dangerously derail[s] it.”¹² Whether these claims made about him are accurate representations is a secondary concern. Such debates, I argue, are organised around the reception of Nandy’s arguments and ideas, including the threat and disruption that they bring to debate. Typically they ignore the methods he adopts to generate critique.

Shrinivas Tilak adds to a reading of these dynamics by characterising the discursive field through which the debates of Indian secularism are carried out. In Tilak’s account the debates unfold with “idealizing on the one hand, and scapegoating and persecuting on the other.”¹³ Following on from Tilak’s account, I claim that the internal logic of these debates is a persecutory logic. It is what I term a politics of blame that structures the responses and representations of critics like Nandy within these debates. More importantly, this politics of blame also determines the possible responses and representations according to its internal persecutory logic. From this position, a series of notable inclusions and exclusions take form structuring the contributions and possible representations in these debates. To follow through on Tilak’s account, those who demonstrate their commitment to the secular ideal are rewarded and idealised, whilst those like Nandy, who confront this ideal and work through its idealised features, are persecuted and dismissed. Therefore those who confront and in Nandy’s case, traverse the secular ideal, even if this is a result of having explored its cultural and psychological viability, are cast as intolerant, as outsiders, and as “arch tyrants.”¹⁴ This logic forecloses an engagement with the complexity of Nandy’s ideas and the methods that he adopts in formulating his confronting claims about secularism. It also forecloses an engagement with the complexity of Nandy’s ideas. In

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¹⁴ Tilak Shrinivas in Arvind Sharma, ed., Ibid., 126.
attempting to marginalise and de-authorise Nandy as critic, it is Nandy’s overwhelming threat of disruption that is defended against.

The recent attempts to represent Nandy as a criminal surely highlight the extent of the perceived threat and the fear that Nandy’s confrontation with secularism produces. These attempts to criminalise Nandy’s identity point to an affective structure that circulates as part of the public discourse on Nandy, and through which his significance as critic is mediated. In May 2008 the Nareendra Modi State Government of Gujarat laid criminal charges against Nandy for an article he wrote in The Times of India on the 8th January 2008. The article titled “Gujarat: Blame the Middle classes” commented on the features of political culture in the Indian State of Gujarat under the leadership of Nareendra Modi. The article draws upon Modi’s victory in the Gujarat elections in 2007 to build the argument that the victory can have little impact on an already profoundly altered Gujarati political culture. Nandy claims this political culture is a product of the hatred and fear generated by an aggrieved Hindu majority against a minority Muslim community, a hatred and fear which leaders like Modi have over the last decade systematically and instrumentally mobilised for political ends. For Nandy, Gujarat represents the social and political ills of Indian secularism that have given rise to a political state and psychic states of hatred and fear perpetuated by the Hindu Right within Indian politics. It is alleged by those supporting the case against Nandy that these comments warrant the charges laid against him for inciting communal tensions and violence. This incident takes the persecutory logic underpinning responses and representations of Nandy and his work to another level. It demonstrates an attempt by the State of Gujarat to police the boundaries of public debate, including the constitutive features of tolerable and intolerable dissent. These attempts by the State of Gujarat to police debate, and in the process, re-cast Nandy as criminal, were overturned by an Indian Supreme Court. The charges which themselves attracted widespread debate and condemnation, particularly from an Indian and international academic community, were ultimately dismissed by the Supreme Court after an appeal was launched on behalf of Nandy in a Delhi Court hearing. The legal outcome, in which the charges against Nandy were dismissed on the grounds of inadequate evidence, can be understood as a re-assertion of Nandy’s identity as legitimate critic of the state. These extreme efforts to re-make and re-cast Nandy’s identity in order to contain his threatening and disruptive
features are all the more interesting given the psychoanalytic focus underpinning his work.

Nandy demonstrates in his work, and primarily through his methods, a willingness to engage with the complexities of human subjectivity. In the case of the article written in 2008 “Gujarat: Blame the Middle Classes,” this psychoanalytic focus reveals itself in the ways Nandy critiques the changed political culture of the State of Gujarat. The shifting of cultural and political priorities in accordance with the ideology of the Hindu Right re-organises the subjectivity of those communities, most vividly captured in the psychic dynamics underpinning relations between Hindu and Muslim communities. The willingness to raise these sensitive and complex issues is consistent with Nandy’s capacity for entering into processes of confrontation and working through in his work.¹⁵ This includes confronting dominant ideals, beliefs, attitudes and defences operating in concepts of self, linked to Indianess and to Indian society and political culture. Nandy does more, however, than simply identifying and confronting these dominant aspects of self and society that foreclose the complexities of subjectivity. His work also denotes a logic of working through the complications that confrontation brings. Central to my argument is my claim that Nandy’s approach to social analysis mirrors the processes of the psychoanalytic encounter. In particular, I will argue that there are strong affinities between working through in a psychoanalytic therapy and the way Nandy works through the cultural and psychic resistances that otherwise block an appreciation of the damage and distortions that the ideology of the Indian secular state has entailed. In building a case for this psychoanalytic focus, I take seriously Nandy’s self-identification as a political psychologist with a psychoanalytic orientation. Implicit in this identification is that psychoanalysis with its “explanatory or interpretive possibilities” has much to contribute to social and political criticism.¹⁶ Thus Nandy is aligned with an approach that turns to the complexities of subjectivity, to external and internal processes, to the border between culture and psyche, in order to address social and political concerns. This appropriation of psychoanalysis manifests through a psychoanalytic mode operating within Nandy’s work; one that enables him to generate

¹⁵ These terms confrontation and working through are central to understanding Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach, and the way he generates social and political criticism. They are theorised at length throughout the dissertation particularly in Part C, Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic.
critical analytic perspectives that resist distortion by the effects of the dominant political ideology.

By shifting attention to Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode of analysis and critique, we can see a deep continuity that has played out across the breadth of his writing. Although on the surface level Nandy’s writings move us through a range of themes: the role of imagining the Indian village in Hindu film; the politics of widow immolation in the practices of Sati during Colonialism; the postcolonial condition; critiquing poverty and the violence of Development; exploring the audibility of dissent; an analysis of Indian and Pakistan relations; Indian Nationalism; the game of cricket in India to name a few. Nandy’s method of critical engagement within these intellectual spaces remains unchanged. It is interesting to note that Nandy acknowledges that the primary focus of his work is generated by a psychoanalytic impetus, and furthermore, that this impetus underpins the range of his scholarship. As he explains, “frankly, many people tell me about the range of my work…but…I would think the range is somewhat narrow in the sense that my primary concern has always been human subjectivity.” In accepting Nandy’s intellectual commitment to exploring human subjectivity, the dissertation theorises Nandy’s mode of critical engagement and his intellectual significance as critic within these terms. I argue that what is distinctive about his social and political criticism, and in turn what contributes to his contested intellectual identity, is this aptitude for generating critical analytic perspectives. Exploring and characterising the operation of a psychoanalytic mode in his work reveals his reliance on psychoanalysis and its application to social and political criticism as “an indispensable vehicle of cultural knowing.” The assumption operating within this reading and the methods that are employed to develop this inquiry, build a case for the importance of psychoanalytic concepts as a necessary interpretive mode for social and political criticism.

The efforts to remake Nandy as a criminal figure in India are all the more arresting given the international recognition and praise he has received. The accolade granted to Nandy in 2007, a few months prior to the incident in Gujarat, demonstrates the intense contestation that surrounds him and his work. In being awarded the prestigious Grand Prize of The Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prize the selection committee acknowledged that, “Professor Ashis Nandy is one of the leading social and cultural critics in not only India

but also the whole of Asia.” This reinforces the view of Nandy as an important intellectual figure whose resonance extends beyond India. However, the committee also recognised that, “he has been a socially committed intellectual who has actively participated in grass roots actions, and therefore, is called the Conscience of India.” That Nandy can be understood as the conscience of India is an image that takes on a deeper level of significance. To be recognised as an intellectual figure that functions as the voice of the cultural or political conscience, is to suggest that there is a distinct psychoanalytic emphasis and capacity demonstrated in his work.

The “conscience” that is applauded as a feature of Nandy’s work and identity as critic, is explored and developed here as an effect of this psychoanalytic mode. As Judith Butler explains in her reading of the role of conscience within human subjectivity, “conscience is the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself, reflecting on itself, establishing itself as reflective and reflexive. The ‘I’ is not simply one who thinks about him – or herself, it is defined by his capacity for reflective self-relation and reflexivity.” Butler’s comments affirm the importance of theorising and characterising the psychoanalytic approach and methods operating in Nandy’s work and identity as the conscience of India. In critiquing the making of identities and of Indianness in Indian political culture, Nandy demonstrates autonomy of thought by theorising the complexities of human subjectivity and the contingency of boundaries within these processes of subject formation. He also demonstrates reflexivity and self-reflexivity in and through his approach. These features are already present in Nandy’s voice as political psychologist, and it is surprising that there is not an adequate conceptual framework through which to explore these aspects of his ideas and method of critique. Equally overlooked is an analysis of the relationship of these psychoanalytic features to Nandy’s contested intellectual identity and significance, particularly in the debates on secularism where his work continues to generate intense controversy. This dissertation directly responds to these concerns, and in the process distinguishes itself from existing critical readings of Nandy’s scholarship and contested intellectual identity.

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20 See Phillip Darby, Ibid., 1.
1.2 Responding to the Multiple Selves of Ashis Nandy

The existing body of secondary literature about Nandy has largely assessed his work by emphasising the critical features of his approach. While these efforts are certainly important, these responses are limited in their ability to fully account for Nandy’s capacity to generate critical analytic perspectives. This capacity, and equally the responses that his work attracts, cannot be adequately understood unless his psychoanalytic mode is fully incorporated into an analysis of his approach. What is instead emphasised in these accounts are the critical ideas within Nandy’s work and the autonomy of thought that he demonstrates. These commentaries focus on Nandy’s non-conformist ways, his maverick style and commitment to “alternative information orders and knowledge systems.” While theorising this autonomy of thought and mode of critical intervention is crucial, doing so through a psychoanalytically informed approach provides a very different account of Nandy and his work, from standard critical readings. A number of examples from scholarship written about Nandy can be cited to illustrate this point of difference between critical and psychoanalytically informed readings. Two examples from the secondary literature stand out, though the second is worthy of a more lengthy analysis. The first example is the collection of essays devoted to the work of Ashis Nandy in a special double edition of the journal Emergencies published in mid-1997. This effort is noteworthy as the first systematic attempt to assess his work, despite as Vinay Lal states, his “being one of the principal social theorists anywhere in the world.” For Lal these efforts must be read alongside Nandy’s eminent status within Indian intellectual life. The essays also succeeded in drawing attention to contemporary Indian scholarship.

It is, however, the publication of Lal’s edited text Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures: The Multiple Selves and Strange Destinations of Ashis Nandy (2000) that is widely recognised within this secondary literature. Lal presents a comprehensive critical reading of Nandy’s intellectual identity and significance. This is detailed in two parts. The first comprises an extensive interview conducted with Nandy, where his autonomy of thought and mode of dissent are explored and reflected upon. The interview outlines the critical significance that can be attached to Nandy’s scholarship and to his identity.

For Lal this takes form largely through Nandy’s commitment to “the defiance of defiance” and in “the liberation for the victims of History.” What is interesting about this claim is Lal’s emphasis on these critical features as central to understanding Nandy’s approach. To what extent these are adequately theorised and characterised within the scope of the text, however, remains open to discussion. The second part of the text brings together a collection of seven essays, written by authors as “Critical Perspectives on Ashis Nandy.” These perspectives contribute to presenting an impression of Nandy and his work, though they are ultimately limited by the critical focus of the text.

For example, in these critical essays, some more personal than others, each theorist approaches and assesses Nandy’s efforts differently. These accounts demonstrate the multiple ways that his identity and significance can be understood and represented. This is a central theme established within the text, referenced by Lal in the title as recognition of Nandy’s multiple selves. The image of a multifaceted identity is supplemented further with what Lal suggests is Nandy’s openness to imagining futures. This connection between subjectivity and the openness characteristic of Nandy’s approach remains under theorised by Lal despite his noting its value. Similarly, according to Lal, Nandy’s intellectual destinations invite us into distinctively strange destinations. However, exactly what constitutes the strangeness of these destinations is not fully explored, nor are the methods that Nandy adopts in order to arrive at these strange destinations and in bringing his readership with him. While a strong psychoanalytic correlation can be established between concepts of strangeness, the confronting, threatening and disruptive, Lal’s critical reading does not adequately account for these features.

Equally significant is Lal’s recognition of an openness within the perspectives Nandy generates on a range of issues and topics. This openness is not entirely separate or separable from what Lal notes are the multiple selves at play. Yet again, this relationship between subjectivity and method is not established within Lal’s conceptual framework, other than noting its presence. Does this multiplicity, for instance, not also denote a deeper, more psychoanalytic concern regarding a divided or de-centred

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subjectivity? Such questions remain unanswered in Lal’s theorisations primarily because there is an absence of a conceptual language or framework that can account for these complexities regarding method, subjectivity and agency. Also significant is Lal’s inability to account for the effects of this openness within Nandy’s work other than to note its defiance of disciplinary conventions and academic formalities. These features of openness are equally central to theorising questions of reflexivity and self-reflexivity within his work and identity. However, this remains unexplored and the connection between this openness and Nandy’s approach is overlooked. Therefore, Lal’s critical analysis cannot account for what Nandy elsewhere reveals to be the distinctively psychoanalytic features of this openness. Nandy comments on this openness in his work by noting that, “it is a projective test. People read what they want in my work. I never close my work, at least too closed. I like open-endedness so that not only can people see me in that, [but] so that people can also put themselves into it. That has always been part of my effort.”

It is worth emphasising that the psychoanalytic focus is already present in his work and in the voice of the political psychologist. This though is not necessarily followed through, leaving Lal using these critical perspectives to affirm, but not adequately account for, the effects of this openness. Similarly Lal does not adequately account for the dissenting mode or the counter-hegemonic attitude to structures of knowledge that Nandy employs in his work. Lal makes much of Nandy’s claim established in his text Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness (1997) where he aligns himself with voices “which defy the given models of defiance.” Lal’s focus seems to be on quantifying and qualifying this defiance, rather than noting the self-reflexivity of the comment. Further overlooked are the reflexivity and self-reflexivity of the title of the text, in which Nandy’s efforts are articulated within an intellectual and political commitment to a concept of awareness. Yet another opportunity, I would suggest, for exploring the psychoanalytic features operating within these concerns. In fairness to Lal though, and his important contributions to this secondary literature, this is not an oversight that is made by him alone.

This oversight is also evident in Makarand Paranjape’s essay published in Lal’s edited text. In Paranjape’s case perhaps the missed opportunity carries a different

weight given the focus he provides for his reflections. In his essay “In the Interstices of Tradition and Modernity: Exploring Ashis Nandy’s Clandestine and Incommunicable Selves,” a psychoanalytic intention can again be noted in the title. This is further supplemented by what he states is his interest “in investigating the kind of self-representation and self-engineering – to use Nandy’s words again- that go on in his work.”27 These parameters of investigation, fascinating as they are, is ultimately found wanting. This is due to the absence of a psychoanalytic framework in which to develop and elaborate on these concerns. Paranjape steers this questioning into different terms, making much of what he sees as Nandy’s modern dilemmas in espousing tradition. Again this is an important, if not contentious connection to make; for Paranjape it is essential to understanding Nandy’s meaningful intervention. Just how this is made possible in Nandy’s writings and perspectives, is critically explained by the ways that he “rehabilitates Gandhi.”28 While Gandhi, as an intellectual directive, certainly performs a symbolic role within Nandy’s work, this does not account for his own aptitude for meaningful intervention. Paranjape ultimately turns his attention to critiquing Nandy for not being “traditional or spiritual enough.”29 While this too is a valid entry point to engage Nandy’s modern dilemmas, what is problematic is Paranjape’s inability to theorise his proposition alongside Nandy’s psychoanalytic features. If Nandy is a “modern and secular” scholar, how is his own modernity confronted and worked through in order to affirm what Paranjape claims is his “sustenance from non-modern sources”?30

Dipesh Chakrabarty comes closer to recognising the ways that these tensions between tradition and modernity, as distinct features of postcolonial India, have been carefully attended to in Nandy’s work. In this reading Chakrabarty in turn recognises a distinctiveness to Nandy’s intellectual identity, alongside a confrontation that takes place within his own postcolonial identity. Chakrabarty acknowledges that it is rare for

28 Paranjape states, “Nandy rehabilitates Gandhi, but not from the usual moralistic, pious, or hagiographic motives; instead, he gives us a Gandhi who is sharp, savvy, contemporary, and an incorrigible gadfly, a clever, inventive, innovative, and playful Gandhi, an inveterate dissenter, in brief, a thinking and thinker’s Gandhi – a born postmodernist, almost.” Vinay Lal, ed., Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures, (2000): 237.
29 Paranjape states, “Instead of attacking Nandy for not being modern or secular enough, let me interrogate him for not being traditional or spiritual enough.” Vinay Lal, ed., Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures, (2000): 239.
these tensions implicit in the modern Indian intellectual to be addressed in such a self-conscious manner as Nandy achieves. For Chakrabarty, Nandy’s efforts and significance can be summarised in the following way: “more than anybody else in India [he] has drawn our attention to the questions the very idea of tradition poses to all modernisers/cultural critics of the subcontinent.”\(^{31}\) While Chakrabarty engages with these tensions critically, in terms of demonstrating how this “problem of the undesirable past – configures itself in Nandy’s work,” the self-consciousness of these efforts, or rather the features of self that facilitate these psychoanalytic methods of self-consciousness, remain uncharted.\(^{32}\) Simply stated, the self-reflexivity generated by Nandy’s approach while acknowledged as significant remains unexplained. Chakrabarty, therefore, falls short of characterising the features of this internal dynamic and exploring the significance of confrontation in Nandy’s work and identity. The connection this internal confrontation has for Nandy’s confronting intellectual destinations within his scholarship is not addressed.

Ziauddin Sardar in his reading of “The A B C D (and E) of Ashis Nandy” describes Nandy’s intellectual aptitude as representative of a thinker who is a polymath, for his, “…thought and scholarship is one long quest for alternatives to the dominant modes of everything! But it would be out of character if Nandy’s alternatives were located within prevailing boundaries, or the search itself followed a common path.”\(^{33}\) Sardar comments on these features of dissent, both in terms of the themes and methods that Nandy’s alternatives point us towards. However, while Sardar comments on a number of these alternatives and the value we might attach to them, again the reasons as to why Nandy is able to actuate these counter-hegemonic perspectives are not fully developed. This maverick attitude that Sardar applauds is accepted as a personality trait, which notwithstanding this possibility also informs Nandy’s identity as critic, especially his recognised and acclaimed identity as the conscience of India.

Arif Dirlik in his contribution titled “Reading Ashis Nandy: The Return of the Past; or Modernity with a Vengeance,” reinforces this same maverick attitude in identifying Nandy as “a voice that is deeply radical in its willingness to confront what


\(^{32}\) Dipesh Chakrabarty, in Vinay Lal, ed., Ibid., 250.

are almost unconsciously accepted faiths of our times."\(^{34}\) While Dirlik rightly comments on a willingness and confrontation operating within his work, concepts central to my own theorisations, these are not analysed in terms of Nandy’s capacity to create these perspectives consistently within his work. Therefore, whilst the effects that his form of social and political criticism produce are widely commented upon in this secondary literature, it is unclear how Nandy is able to generate this form of criticism as a consistent feature in his writings.

Similar responses are evident in recent interviews conducted with Nandy, in the questions that are asked and the comments that frame these interviews. One example is from the Iranian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo in his recent interview with Nandy published as *Talking India: Ashis Nandy in Conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo* (2006). Jahanbegloo begins by characterising Nandy’s intellectual significance in terms of his contribution to a dialogue of cross-cultural and cross-political studies. Yet, as he points out, the pathway this dialogue advocates is not determined by Nandy’s local or international profile, his localised and international interests. Rather it is marked by a distinctively dissenting impetus. Jahanbegloo describes this in terms of an “acute critique of all homogenisation projects and the imposition of a cultural grid on another culture.”\(^{35}\) Phillip Darby, in an interview reflecting on Nandy’s intellectual significance, reiterates these views. He suggests that what, “interests [Nandy] are to disturb set opinion, or conventional understandings of things, so [within his work] there are both shocks and excites.”\(^{36}\) What distinguishes Darby’s comments from these critical readings is his acknowledgement of these affects of “shocks and excites,” which Nandy’s work elicits. In noting these affects Darby gestures towards a psychoanalytic reading, one, which proves a useful starting point for the analysis undertaken here. What Darby notes as shocks and excites are developed in this dissertation through the psychoanalytic categories of *horror* and *fascination*. These concepts have a specific role to play in theorising Nandy’s contested intellectual identity, and the significance attached to the confrontations that he enters into through his work.

While a dissenting impetus is already established in these critical readings, there is


a greater complexity at play that Darby describes as a visceral reaction. This reaction is not only limited to the reception of Nandy’s work and the response of the reader. What is experienced as a reaction, as an effect and affect also informs the reflexivity and self-reflexivity that Nandy demonstrates in and through his work. Therefore, while these critical reflections are valuable contributions to an evolving secondary body of literature, the omission of a psychoanalytic reading is striking in light of these concerns. What is commented on very effectively as the external effects of his work, such as the democratisation of knowledge and the pluralisation of knowledge systems, cannot be removed from the internal dynamics emphasised in this analysis. Nandy’s mode of critical intervention, understood as a psychoanalytic mode, has much to reveal about how these external and internal dynamics operate within his work and his identity as a critic. In Nandy’s work it is the positioning of the border between the inner world(s) of the subject, what can be termed the psyche, and the outer world(s), that which can be noted as culture, which is addressed, and thus is characteristic of his approach. For Nandy, the way this border between internal and external processes is positioned needs to be engaged with and analysed for it tells us something about the way individual subjectivity (self) and collective subjectivity (society) is formed. Moreover, for Nandy it is the dynamic interplay between internal and external processes, and the recovery of the possibility of a dynamic interplay between psyche and culture, that needs to be preserved. Thus his approach can be understood as a warning against foreclosing the precariousness of these processes, and the ambivalence inherent in human subjectivity. Nandy’s own intellectual sensitivity for the ways in which subjectivity is formed, and the boundary between psyche and culture, are equally important for theorising his intellectual identity, and in particular, the significance that is attached to his voice as critic of the state.

1.3 A Psychoanalytic Reading of Self and Society

Despite the emphasis placed on analysing Nandy’s critical features in the secondary literature, the unapologetic psychoanalytic methods employed in his work are discernable in a number of places. This is illustrated, in a more obvious way, in the titles of his essays and texts where Nandy’s receptiveness to psychoanalytic themes and concerns is apparent. These titles reveal his psychoanalytic intentions and the scope of his inquiry. For example, in not necessarily listing these titles but in noting some of the
phrases used, this commitment is, if not established, then at least made upfront. Phrases like “Possible and retrievable selves,” “a politics of awareness,” “the secret politics of our desires,” “the intimate enemy,” “loss and recovery of self,” “the savage Freud,” and “time warps: silent and evasive pasts,” gesture towards this psychoanalytic focus.37 This commitment to a psychoanalytic approach is affirmed in Nandy’s writings and through his self-identification and self-representation as a political psychologist.38 It is important to note that Nandy’s training as a psychologist, which as he explains “was heavily psychoanalytic at that time and so was heavily anti-quantitative,” together with his interest in the psychology of politics, have informed his self-identification as political psychologist.39 To accept this identification is to recognise a marrying of psychoanalytic methods, including psychoanalytic theory with social and political concerns. This provides a context in which to locate Nandy’s intellectual sensitivity for the positioning of external and internal boundaries, the boundaries between culture and psyche; his sensitivity for theorising the complexities of human subjectivities; his attentiveness to


38 In his writings Nandy privileges psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically informed approaches to social and political criticism. For instance, he argues that psychoanalysis is one of “the two most influential in-house critiques of the modern West” in addition to Marxism, as both are deeply ambivalent towards their culture of origin, and thus well placed as a form of critique. Commenting on psychoanalysis in India Nandy argues that, “psychoanalysis also had to serve as new instrument of social criticism, as a means of demystifying aspects of Indian culture that seemed anachronistic or pathological to the articulate middle classes, and as a dissenting western school of thought that could be turned against the West itself.” See The Savage Freud: The First Non-Western Psychoanalyst and the Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India,” in Ashis Nandy, ibid., 81; 83. Nandy’s own interest and critical appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis is explored in Ashis Nandy, “Freed, Modernity and Postcolonial Violence: Analytic Attitude, Dissent and the Boundaries of the Self,” http://www.littlenag.com/looking/ashinandy.html 4(5&6) 2004. See also “Chapter 1: The Twentieth Century: The Ambivalent Homecoming of Homo Psychologicus,” in Time Treks: The Uncertain Future of the Old and New Despotisms, London: Seagull Books, 2008: 1-22.

the inclusions and exclusions operating in power relations and in processes of identification. It also provides a context for Nandy’s concern with the ways in which dominant and official accounts of politics and political identities can foreclose alternative expressions and accounts of self and society. Nandy thus warns against the dangers of standardisation and homogenisation, features that also have a psychoanalytic component in his analysis. It is this psychoanalytic commitment that underpins Nandy’s critique of secularism and directs his broader engagement or rather confrontation with the boundaries of politics and Indian democracy. For as he warns, deeply imbedded defences within a society, like the defence of the secular ideal within Indian politics can “limit the play with self-definitions, ego boundaries and identity fragments, that is needed to unleash the potentialities of a culture of participatory democracy.”40 The concept of politics that Nandy is interested in working with and in working through is defined by this psychoanalytic focus on the ways that the complexities of subjectivity are foreclosed in a dominant political culture, notably a dominant modern Indian secular political culture. Nandy’s approach in responding to these concerns, raptures established dominant meanings and defences, and regenerates meaning by unleashing the potentialities of a democratic culture. As he states “not only must politics work with – and work out – the contradictions in human subjectivity, that subjectivity in turn concretises, perhaps better than any action, the state of politics in a society.”41

Nandy’s engagement with the boundaries of politics is defined by this commitment to a psychoanalytic questioning of subjectivities. This includes questioning the formation of subjectivities, concepts of agency, processes of identification, and what the contemporary cultural critic Judith Butler notes are processes of subjection.42 To confront and work through the inclusions and exclusions operating within politics in this way as Nandy does is to recognise the interplay between external and internal processes. It is to confront what Butler in her arresting characterisation describes as the “psychic life of power.”43 In elaborating on the processes of subject formation alongside questions of subjection, as a process of power exerted on the subject, Butler’s reading problematises issues of subjugation and autonomy. This analysis emphasises an interesting paradox, in that although external to the subject, “subjection is nevertheless a

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41 See the “Preface” in Ashis Nandy, At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980).
43 Judith Butler, Ibid., 11.
power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming.\textsuperscript{44} Such readings of subjectivity address the positioning of the boundaries in the formation of the subject, in addition to the contingency and ambivalence of the boundaries, between self and other, public and private, secular and non-secular, psychology and politics. In recognising Nandy’s psychoanalytic conceptualisation of politics, his marrying of psychoanalysis with political theory, this inquiry demonstrates his intellectual sensitivity for the ways the boundaries of politics and political identities are configured, and the inclusions and exclusions at play. Although not necessarily articulated in these terms in Nandy’s work, the psychic life of power and the way in which this operates within individual and collective accounts of subjectivity is central to the confrontations he enters into.

In a collection of essays offering a cultural and psychological biography of the modern Indian nation state, published as \textit{The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics} (2002), this psychoanalytic approach is demonstrated.\textsuperscript{45} In the preface of the text, Nandy suggests that the concept of politics he is interested in and in further contributing to, is the dynamic interplay between external and internal processes, in theorising politics at the borders between culture and psyche. This approach includes critiquing or rupturing the constituting features of the psychic life of power. It also allows for processes of \textit{regeneration}, given that “politics can be an instrument of collective creativity.”\textsuperscript{46} These processes for Nandy notably include a vital “collective creativity” in addressing questions of subjectivity, the boundaries of the Indian state and in exploring concepts of dissent. For as he affirms in the text “the essays in this book explore the vicissitudes of the idea of the modern state under different cultural and psychological conditions.”\textsuperscript{47} These efforts can be described in terms of Nandy’s rupturing and regeneration of dominant, official and homogenising accounts of selfhood and of Indianness. In doing so, he also ruptures and regenerates the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operating in politics. Nandy, consistent with this approach thus claims that, “politics is nothing less than a means of redefining a society’s selfhood by

\textsuperscript{44} Judith Butler, \textit{Ibid.}, 11.
\textsuperscript{45} This is not the only possible example here of Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach to understanding politics, but is simply referenced to make the point in my discussion. Other texts that equally make this point include \textit{At the Edge of Psychology}, (1980); \textit{The Savage Freud}, (1995); \textit{Time Warps}, (2002).
\textsuperscript{46} Nandy elaborates that, “work in this area has taught me that in an open society, however imperfect the openness, politics can be an instrument of collective creativity.” Ashis Nandy, \textit{The Romance of the State}, (2002): ix.
\textsuperscript{47} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, ix.
renegotiating the distribution of power and the legitimacy of existing centres of power in different domains of life.”

This psychoanalytic approach to politics, marked by sensitivity for the psychic life of power, is also evident in earlier writings. *The Savage Freud: And Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (1995), which accompanies *The Romance of the State* (2002), demonstrates this commitment. In this text, methods in support of a Freudian depth psychology are established amidst a psychoanalytic exploration of possible and retrievable selves underpinning the boundaries of politics. In addressing politics as an ontological condition, theorising possible and retrievable selves takes on a distinctively psychoanalytic focus. This includes exploring the ways that subjectivity is formed and the inclusions and exclusions at play within these accounts of individual and collective selfhood. Nandy’s task, while not marked by an emphasis on retrieving self, explores the possibility of self in rupturing and recreating subjectivity.

The question remains as to how Freud, as the psychoanalytic directive, appears within Nandy’s work, and furthered the operation of this method in the text. What does the expression *The Savage Freud: And Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves*, the title of the text actually reference? Does this title, for instance, reflect upon the psychoanalytic methods and identity that Nandy might claim as his own? Are Nandy’s non-conformist methods, including his non-conformist Freudian methods being referenced as savagely applied? Or is Nandy as the non-Western Indian scholar representing himself through an internalised colonial mirror as the savage subject? These questions demand a more sustained characterisation of these psychoanalytic methods, including Nandy’s self-reflexive musings. In the text, “the author of these essays,” explains that, “he is not the offspring of village India…He is a child of modern India, looking for a language of social criticism that will not be entirely alien to a majority of Indians who have been increasingly empowered by an open political process, however, imperfect that openness.” Following this passage the clues for these possible and retrievable selves, including his own, are to be found in Nandy’s

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49 The expression “The Savage Freud” is also referenced in the title of one of the essays published in the text. The essay titled “The Savage Freud: The first Non-Western Psychoanalyst and The Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India” explores the first non-western psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose (1886–1953) who pioneered the discipline in India, and who founded the Indian Psychoanalytic Society in 1921. In the essay Nandy argues that Bose is the ‘savage Freud.’ To what extent though can Nandy also be understood as the ‘savage Freud?’ See Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud* (1995).
celebration of the pluralism within Indian democracy and Indian culture. Is the voice of the “radical democrat”, however, inconsistent with these psychoanalytic interests and methods that Nandy demonstrates?\textsuperscript{51} The self-reflexivity of Nandy’s comments invites, and even demands, that these psychoanalytic features of the critic and his work be characterised.

\subsection*{1.4 Methods in Defence of the Psychoanalytic}

This dissertation turns to psychoanalytic concepts and methods of interpretation in order to theorise the relationship between ideas, method and subjectivity in Nandy’s work. The psychoanalytic concepts that I apply in this inquiry provide a conceptual framework for further locating and theorising the existing psychoanalytic features present in Nandy’s work and in his identity as critic. These concepts as applied reveal Nandy’s method, and build a case for the importance of these psychoanalytic methods for social and political criticism. Although the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work is present in his writings, this capacity and aptitude is not always recognisable; moreover, it remains under theorised as a feature of Nandy’s approach to social and political criticism. There are a number of reasons for this oversight, including Nandy’s own self-professed de-professionalised approach to the ways that psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic concepts are employed in his work. As he notes the psychoanalytic impetus and method in his work is not always “recognised as psychoanalysis proper!”\textsuperscript{52}

This self-professed de-professionalised application is, I argue, consistent with his confrontation with homogenising and standardising approaches to knowledge and knowledge production. To adopt Phillip Rieff’s expression, the “analytic attitude” that Nandy adopts and further refines through his work therefore, simultaneously demonstrates a dissenting analytic attitude, warning against the closure of the dynamism inherent within the Freudian psychoanalytic enterprise.\textsuperscript{53} Other reasons for this under


\textsuperscript{52} Christine DeFtereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session I,” (2005): p.8. It should be noted that within the scope of this dissertation I do not explore in any detail how Nandy, for example, deviates from Freud in his application of Freudian meta-psychological concepts, other than to note the idiosyncratic and dissenting features of this psychoanalytic mode within his work, and in turning to characterise this mode.

theorised aspect of his work include deeper and more complex resistances to psychoanalytic perspectives and methods of interpretation.  

Given the latter I apply three sets of concepts from contemporary theorists to establish a conceptual framework for Nandy’s existing approach. The first set of concepts is from Judith Butler in her account of The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (1997). In The Psychic Life of Power, Butler offers an account of the formation of subjectivity. This account of subjectivity takes place in and through the psychic features of power. The psychic life of power and of ideology operates through processes of subjection, in the making of subjectivities. The psychic dimensions of power are evident in and through these processes of becoming a subject. Butler’s conceptual framework is useful for understanding the argument Nandy makes about subjectivity, and the making of political identities within Indian political culture. Although not necessarily articulated in these terms, Nandy’s analysis of the ways in which the political subject and political citizen are formed and made over within a dominant and normative secular political culture speaks directly to these processes of subjection. For example, within his critique of secularism Nandy confronts the ways in which these processes of subjection operate to construct and make over religious and ethnic identities into political identities. Nandy demonstrates the ways that the psychic life of secularism operates, and confronts and traverses its dominant and homogenising features.

The second set of concepts that I apply to theorise the interplay between external and internal processes in Nandy’s work is taken from key concepts developed in the work of the French psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Julia Kristeva. I explore Nandy’s sensitivity to the positioning of boundaries and the inclusions and exclusions that result from these by turning to Kristeva’s work in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982). Within this text Kristeva advances her own account of subject formation by introducing two new concepts as a means to understanding the positioning of

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boundaries within subjectivity. These concepts the *abject* and *abjection* inform Kristeva’s contributions to theorising human subjectivity, taking on a specific meaning. For Kristeva these concepts belong to “the archaic structures of pre-symbolic subjectivity” denoting formative and more importantly, precarious stages in these processes of *becoming*.\(^\text{55}\) They are associated with pre-Oedipal stages of subject formation, within what Kristeva defines in her work as the semiotic. These are, therefore, processes prior to entry into culture and language, before subjectivity and a concept of self has been established within the symbolic register. Within these processes of subject formation that which is abject is located in these pre-symbolic processes, returning us then as a regression back into these familiar but radically uncomfortable prior states within the semiotic. The abject and abjection are affective states, that are associated with that which is threatening and which have the capacity to return us to these pre-symbolic states of incompleteness and radical ambiguity. In these processes of *becoming* that which is disruptive and threatening therefore, must be expelled and cast away from view.

The abject and abjection are states that must be cast away and for Kristeva even violently expelled if subjectivity and selfhood are to be formed. That which represents the effects of the abject is profoundly threatening for it “disturbs identity, system, order.”\(^\text{56}\) In doing so it carries forward a very real and potential threat of our return to pre-symbolic states, of our own unravelling where “all meaning collapses – especially what it means to be an I.”\(^\text{57}\) Abjection as the point of the positioning of the boundaries between subject and object is a threatening reminder of the precariousness and contingency of these boundaries of subjectivity. While these states are radically horrifying to our sense of self, given that the abject threatens to unravel selfhood, for Kristeva there is also another important characteristic. For the abject is an affective state, formidable in the ways in which it both horrifies and fascinates. Despite the tacit knowledge that the abject “does not respect borders, positions, rules,” and can therefore radically assault what is our ontological security, the horror and fascination take over working against each other to create a constant tension. This dynamic tension between horror and fascination, as that which attracts and repels, mark the abject; it is, as

\(^{55}\) Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 20. The semiotic it should be noted is one of three categories – the semiotic, chora and thetic – which Kristeva introduces to her account of the constitution of the subject.


Kristeva describes, something that “simultaneously beseeches and pulverises the subject.”

The abject and abjection, at least as they are applied to this inquiry, denote fascination and horror as a real and potential threat which can radically disrupt subjectivity and concepts of selfhood. Kristeva’s concept situates this threat alongside the positioning of boundaries. In applying this to Nandy’s work this allows for a more complex analysis of the positioning of boundaries within subjectivity, central to Nandy’s work, his intellectual identity and significance. Fascination and horror are affective states that violently affirm the need to safeguard these boundaries of the subject and object, self and other, and maintain established borders of inclusion and exclusion. To resist abjection is a very necessary expression of protection, a vital defence in order to ward off this very real and potential threat to the breakdown of self and identity and, in turn, the possibility for re-organization, or the re-making of subjectivity. These concepts are applied to theorise Nandy’s sensitivity for the positioning of boundaries in his work. However, the abject and abjection in this analysis also serve an additional function. These concepts are also useful in shedding light on some of the discursive representations of Nandy in the debates on secularism; the fascination and horror that he elicits in raising and addressing these issues. Thus, in the broader focus of the dissertation, the abject and abjection enable Nandy’s intellectual sensitivity for the positioning of boundaries to be explored in relation to the complexities of understanding and representing his own identity as critic.

The final set of concepts that I apply in the dissertation is from Kristeva and her account of psychoanalytic processes of revolt. I draw on Kristeva’s conceptualisation of revolt to characterise Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach or the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work and identity as critic. Kristeva’s writings across two volumes, The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 1 (2000) and Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2 (2002) detail these processes. These texts can be situated alongside Kristeva’s efforts to recover the concept of a revolt from its exclusive political foundations. Kristeva redress this by re-claiming and politicising the psychotherapeutic possibilities of revolt. Her account of these processes can also be understood as a return to Freud and the transferential features of analytic revolt. Consistent with Freudian psychoanalysis and

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psychotherapeutic practice, to revolt for Kristeva is in simple terms to enter into an *analysis* and *psychoanalytic processes*. Revolt denotes processes of turning inwards, into processes of anamnesis, of a retrospective questioning and of retrospective return. This turning inwards takes place in order to *work with* and *working through* the boundaries of subjectivity, including projections, introjections, fantasies and ideals in order to *regenerate* our understanding of ourselves. These processes of revolt include a rupture and regeneration of self and by extension self and other relations. Revolt as a psychoanalytic concept therefore, references processes that safeguard our individual and collective capacities to question and challenge, to *rupture*, confront and work through established values, norms, assumptions, and associations within psychic life.

For Kristeva, revolt as a critical function, preserves wellbeing within psychic life, and is vital to our subjectivity and existence. What is potentially therapeutic, though not necessarily a cure is that through these processes of anamnesis and retrospective questioning there is the potential for a regeneration of subjectivity. This for Kristeva is described as the goal of a psychic re-birth. To this extent revolt denotes internal processes which enable meaning and signification to be *regenerated*, thus proving the possibility of the *re-articulation* of signification elsewhere. This rupturing and regeneration of the boundaries of our own selfhood or subjectivity takes place within imaginary identifications, and in its moment of (re)articulation, also at the level of meaning and signification. This possibility of a re-birth is therapeutic, however deeply confronting and even loathsome. For it places us face to face with our most intimate psychic defences and resistances. However, in working through these resistances, the therapeutic possibilities of revolt are evident in this ruptured and regenerated meaning and signification.

In connecting and applying these processes to characterise Nandy’s capacity for confrontation and in working through these confrontations, a number of claims can be made. Notably, there is a greater complexity attached to Nandy’s confrontations. For confrontation denotes both internal processes and external effects. Suggesting that the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work can be described as a *psychoanalytic mode as revolt* is to acknowledge Nandy’s capacity to rupture and regenerate subjectivity, including his own. The operation of a psychoanalytic mode as a revolt in his work is suggestive of what Kristeva notes is intimate revolt, and this method is intimately connected to his subjectivity. In claiming that revolt best describes this psychoanalytic
mode and the complexities of Nandy’s intellectual identity, I detail the ways that these processes of rupture and regeneration operate.

Nandy’s own description of his use of psychoanalysis as executed with a de-professionalised gaze is relevant here. For in providing a psychoanalytic framework to understand these dynamics, I am not proposing a structure into which Nandy and his work might fit. For Kristeva’s account of revolt is itself a concept that is profoundly dynamic as she attempts to retrieve the dynamism of Freud’s concept of psychic life from the Freudianism that has attempted to contain the disruptive and regenerative features of psychic life. In Kristeva’s account, the dynamism of revolt is evident in the “twists and turns” that it takes in accordance with the timelessness of psychic space. Revolt is not a structure that can be contained, but a series of dynamic internal and external processes that resist closure and finality. As Kristeva warns us, to homogenise or attempt to foreclose these processes of revolt is detrimental to subjectivity. The suspension of revolt is quite literally for Kristeva, the suspension of thought and the end of subjectivity.

An important distinction needs to be made here between revolt and abjection. Abjection as an affective state of instability threatens the subject (Kristeva’s “subject-in-process”) with the disruption of being lost in the borderlands of signification, as neither subject nor object, as “the not yet entitled subject.” The suspension of revolt denotes for Kristeva the end of subjectivity. The argument that follows from these conceptual claims is that, in characterising a psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating in Nandy’s work, he is able to consistently rupture and regenerate subjectivity in and through these critical analytic perspectives. In doing so, Nandy’s own subjectivity and his identity as critic are remade in these moments, a modality that enables him to resist abjection. This is explored in terms of the ways in which a recovery of alternatives and

possibilities takes place within his work. This recovery takes place in reclaiming the
dynamic and regenerative features of subjectivity. In Nandy’s work this recovery of
subjectivity, ruptures and regenerates not only concepts of self but also our relations to
others. This takes place consistent with the internal dynamics of revolt as always and
necessarily in tandem with recognition of our own radical alterity.

1.5 The Structure of the Dissertation: from Symptomatic to Psychotherapeutic

This dissertation travels from phobic object to psychoanalytic mode or from the
symptomatic to the psychotherapeutic in order to theorise and characterise the
psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work and by extension his identity as critic. This
inquiry into the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work and the methods he adopts to
actuate these perspectives is structured by three primary questions. These three
questions are addressed in the three sections of the dissertation.

Firstly I question how this psychoanalytic focus underpinning Nandy’s critique of
secularism takes form. This is detailed in PART A: The Pathologies of Secularism. In
Chapter Two, An Anti-Secular Manifesto: The Cultural and Psychological Viability of
Secularism, Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach is explored through the confrontations he
enters into in critiquing the psychic life of secularism operating in Indian political
culture and within political identities. Chapter Three, Ambivalence and Contradiction:
Containing Concepts of Indianness, expands on this further by detailing the ways Hindu
Nationalism for Nandy forecloses ambivalence and contradiction within subjectivity
and within Indian traditions and culture.

The second question I explore in the dissertation is to consider the implications
Nandy’s confrontations with secularism have for understanding the identity of the critic.
This is considered by exploring the ways that Nandy’s ideas and approach are received
within academic and public debates on secularism. In PART B: Symptomatic Responses
Reading the Politics of Blame, I argue that Nandy and his ideas are radically threatening
and disruptive. Moreover, I argue that the location of agitation and fascination for critics
lies in Nandy’s willingness to confront accepted identities, meanings, fantasies,
projections and ideals operating in politics, and in working through the complexities of
subjectivity. Consequently the responses and representations of Nandy’s work and, by
extension, his identity as critic are organised around what I argue is a politics of blame.
This politics of blame, structured by a persecutory and narcissistic logic, finds expression in what I suggest is a symptomatic register. As I argue certain responses from critics operating in academic and public debates illustrate that they are trapped in a mode of engagement, that directly responds to the perceived and real disruption and threat that Nandy represents. In Chapter Four, Ashis Nandy as Phobic Object and Abjection: The Conceptual Battleground of Anti-Secularism and Culturalism, I detail the ways that Nandy’s identity is made over by this persecutory and narcissistic logic. This is explored in representations of him as the Freudian phobic object, and in the abject status he is afforded as the irreverent and irrelevant critic. In Chapter Five, A Colonial Thinker Re-Staging the Logic of Critique in Public Debates, I examine the ways that this politics of blame and persecutory logic reproduces itself within public debates. I argue that these over-determined responses of Nandy reinforce his threatening and disruptive ideas at the expense of engaging with the psychoanalytic focus of his claims.

The final question I consider in the dissertation is how to characterise the psychoanalytic focus underpinning Nandy’s ideas, methods and identity as critic. In the final part of the dissertation PART C: Critical Interventions Towards the Psychotherapeutic I argue that Nandy’s subjectivity is intimately connected to the methods he adopts in his work. In Chapter Six, Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics, I explore the way Nandy confronts and works through dominant political ideas and ideals. Nandy directly confronts the fear and threat of democratic pluralism and what he terms a post-secular awareness operating in Indian politics. This psychoanalytic confrontation and working through in his work also extends to confronting and working through parts of self. In Chapter Seven, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention, I draw on Kristeva’s concept of revolt to characterise the psychoanalytic mode operating within Nandy’s work and in his identity as critic. This psychoanalytic mode enables Nandy to generate critical analytic perspectives that resist the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology and enable subjectivity to be regenerated. Chapter Eight, From Phobic Object to Psychoanalytic Mode: Resisting Abjection, explores the integrity and permanent features of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt by demonstrating the way this mode operates in examples of Nandy’s work. In building a case for the psychoanalytic features of Nandy’s work and identity this dissertation affirms that the methods by which social and political criticism is advanced
are important. I conclude that the significance of Nandy’s methods and his capacity to generate critical analytic perspectives lies in its open invitation. This invitation to enter into these psychoanalytic processes of rupturing and regenerating subjectivity has implications beyond Nandy’s work. It is an invitation and reminder of our own possibility for revolt, a capacity fundamental to human subjectivity and social and political criticism.
PART A

The Pathologies of Secularism
“Like for example, my critique of Modernity. Somebody recently said in a very savage attack that I did not know anything about pre-modern India. But I am not concerned with the history of pre-modern India. I am not concerned with that! I am concerned with pre-modern India as it exists today. This is a very heavy psychological effort in the sense that the pre-modern India that you carry within you, is in tension with the modern Indian, the living. So it is that level which I am negotiating and that language of negotiation is psychological, where I know that it is very deliberately done because that is the way one constructs pasts in a critical encounter. Healer’s case history is not the same as the history of the historian. It is a very different thing. The past remains alive in a very different way. We all know that, but we don’t buy it.”

Ashis Nandy
Christine Deftereos, Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session II (2005)
Chapter 2: 
An Anti-Secular Manifesto? 
The Cultural and Psychological Viability of Secularism

In this chapter I outline Nandy’s critique of secularism as primarily a confrontation with the cultural and psychological viability of secularism in India. Detailed in the essay “An Anti-Secular Manifesto” published in 1985, I argue that the cultural and psychological viability of secularism is made apparent through the psychoanalytic approach that Nandy adopts.¹ This psychoanalytic focus is central to the anti-secular claims advanced in his critique. Nandy challenges, and ultimately rejects, the ways in which the pursuit of a secular ideal within Indian political culture works to foreclose subjectivity, concepts of Indianness and concepts of tolerance in specific ways. The making of the subject into politically recognised identities within Indian political culture is central to this task. For Nandy, this is where the crisis of secularism or, as he prefers, the pathologies of secularism are to be found: in what Judith Butler terms is “the psychic life of power.”² In Butler’s text, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997) the psychic life of power and of ideology operates through processes of subjection in the making of the subject. The psychic life of power operates *in* and *through* these processes of *becoming* a subject. Butler’s conceptual framework is useful for understanding the argument Nandy makes about subjectivity and the making of political identities within Indian political culture. Although not necessarily articulated within these terms, Nandy’s analysis of the ways in which the political subject and political citizen are formed and made over within a dominant and normative secular political culture speaks directly to these processes of subjection.

What is equally significant about Butler’s account of the formation of subjectivity is that this subjection to power is paradoxical. In Butler’s reading, subjection signifies “the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a

subject.” Butler emphasises the necessity of subordination in order for subjectivity and in turn, the identity of the subject to be secured. Submitting to power is a fundamental condition for becoming a subject and central to the ontological security derived from these processes of subjection. In Nandy’s critique, this paradox characterises the way in which political identities are formed, and the inclusions and exclusions that result from these processes. It is here, I argue, that Nandy’s anti-secularism is detailed and worked through: in the ways in which these inclusions and exclusions operate to consolidate a dominant and normative Indian political culture and political identities. Nandy’s confrontation with secularism also demonstrates an intellectual sensitivity to the ways in which the boundaries between secular and non-secular, public and private, tolerance and intolerance are cast. Where Butler provides a language for explaining these processes of subjection, Nandy critiques the ways that these processes operate in Indian secular political culture. Nandy’s critique of the ways identities, political culture and politics are constituted in relation to a dominant secular ideal is central to this task.

Julia Kristeva’s work is also useful for understanding the ways that these processes of subjection operate within Nandy’s critique of secularism, and to demonstrate the confronting features of his anti-secular position. Kristeva’s account of processes of becoming or subject formation, and her emphasis on the importance of the positioning of the boundaries of subjectivity, including the precariousness of these boundaries, is relevant for detailing the argument that Nandy makes about the formation of the subject and of political culture. Kristeva’s contributions to psychoanalytic theory and her own account of processes of becoming are well documented and widely critiqued. Equally well documented is her application of psychoanalysis to political theory, and in theorising political processes. However, it is Kristeva’s concept of the

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abject that I turn to here, in order to explore the importance of the positioning of the boundaries of subjectivity and border points. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) Kristeva theorises at length the positioning of boundaries (the inclusions and exclusions) that take place in the formation of subjectivity, or within processes of becoming. Although these processes of inclusion and exclusion are necessary in order for the boundaries of selfhood to form, these processes are precarious and denoted by Kristeva’s concept of the *abject*. The concept of the *abject* in her analysis captures that which must be cast away and repudiated in order for the boundaries of subjectivity to be secured. The *abject* and *abjection* are concepts which belong to pre-symbolic and hence, formative stages of subject formation. What is of interest are the ways in which she emphasises the precariousness of these processes, located as they are within pre-symbolic stages of subject formation. The abject provokes an affective state, of fascination and horror, as that which both lures and repels. Moreover, it is representative of a highly threatening and disruptive dynamic, a dynamic that *can* and *has* the potential to return us to pre-symbolic states. It references that which must *necessarily* be cast away in these processes of becoming, despite its fascination and because of its horror, in order for subjectivity to be formed and the boundaries of selfhood secured. Therefore, that which is representative of the abject is profoundly disruptive and threatening. The abject is that which re-affirms and reminds us of the precariousness of these processes, especially the positioning of the boundaries of selfhood. The abject within Kristeva’s account carries forward the very real and potential threat of disrupting subjectivity. The dangers and the threat of the abject are in its disruption of subjectivity: that which can return us to the borderlands of signification as neither subject nor object. The abject carries forward fascination, accompanied by threat (both real and perceived), disruption, ambivalence and even the loss of identity.

The concept of the abject is applied in this chapter to theorise the way Nandy confronts the positioning of boundaries, and the inclusions and exclusions operating within the psychic life of power. In critiquing these processes of subjection operating within the secular ideal, Nandy’s analysis emphasises aspects of Indian culture and concepts of selfhood, including Indianess deemed threatening and disruptive to this

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As Kristeva explains, “what is abject is not my correlative, which providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to the I.” *Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 2.
ideal. I contend that what is radically confronting about his anti-secular position is this psychoanalytic focus on aspects of selfhood and of Indianness which have been abjected from view in pursuit of this secular ideal. This is where Nandy’s anti-secularism is advanced, through this psychoanalytic questioning of these processes of subjection operating in Indian politics. In Nandy’s account, the secular political subject instituted and authorised as ideal political subject brings to the fore a number of tensions between these processes of becoming and existing concepts of selfhood and Indianness. These are explored in “An Anti-Secular Manifesto” as tensions between the psychic life of a dominant secular modernity and a pre-modern or non-modern cultural self. For Nandy the non-modern cultural self still exists, albeit latent in Indian political culture today. To this extent, addressing these processes of subjection is significant for Nandy’s critique of modernity and what he cautions are its increasing homogenising and standardising effects. These processes of subjection and compliance, with what Nandy argues is an inherited western secular ideal, bring to the fore a crucial dynamic which needs to be worked through.⁶ For Nandy, confronting and ultimately rejecting the ideal is central to the production of critique and his anti-secular position. He describes this task as one that necessitates an intellectual sensitivity for external and internal processes, the positioning of the border between culture and psyche, and in doing so reveals something of his method of critique. Nandy states that, “this is a very heavy psychological effort in the sense that the pre-modern India that you carry within you, is I see in tension with the modern Indian, the living. So it is that level which I am negotiating and that language of negotiation is psychological…”⁷

Whether this cultural self or pre-modern self can be entirely cast away or abjected from view through these processes of subjection operating within Indian political culture is dubious. Therefore, that which has been repressed from view, or cast away, in establishing the normative political subject and a normative concept of toleration, forms an important part of his reading of Indian politics. This includes confronting the limits and limitations in pursuing this official secular ideal; the ways in which ambivalence

⁶ In this chapter I use the concept of working through to denote the confrontation that Nandy enters into with the secular ideal. In the latter part of the dissertation I explore the relevance of this confrontation and working through to Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach. See PART C, Critical Interventions Towards the Psychotherapie. Here the concept takes on a greater complexity, when I explore the features of this working through and its significance for theorising and characterising the method of critique operating in Nandy’s work.

within subjectivity is foreclosed in the making of political identities; and the ways in which concepts of toleration already present for him within Indian culture are overshadowed by a dominant and official secular mode of toleration. Nandy’s capacity to identify, confront and work through these issues exemplifies the psychoanalytic focus, and the intersection between psychoanalysis and political theory, structuring his critique of secularism.

2.1 Official Tolerance and the Limits of State Secularism

In “An Anti-Secular Manifesto,” Ashis Nandy distinguishes between two different meanings of secularism that exist in contemporary Indian political culture. The first definition is traditionally a western account, in which the ideology of secularism is defined by the separation and freeing of politics from religion. In this definition of secularism, which for Nandy is an inherited western political ideal, the normative assumption operating is that the more secular a state is, the more tolerant it will be. It is argued that this secular ideal is integral to concepts of social and political amity and in safeguarding an official concept of tolerance in Indian political culture. Within this inherited ideal, the sacred is understood as having no role to play in expressions of tolerance within public life, and even less to contribute to the sphere of politics and democratic process. In contrast to this view, Nandy claims there is a second, more local definition of secularism discernable, although latent within Indian culture and society today. This non-modern Indian meaning, derived from the traditions and cultural practices of the Indic civilisation, has survived as a reminder of alternative processes of identification and social and political organization. In this account secularism is understood not in opposition to the sacred, but in opposition to the pathologies of intolerance, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and fanaticism. Nandy’s analysis thus distinguishes between an inherited concept of secular modernity and existing non-modern or pre-modern modes of identification and social and political organization. This distinction generates a series of tensions, particularly between official modern and

8 There is an extensive body of literature critiquing this secular ideal as an inherited ideal and as a product of western modernity. It is argued that this is significant for understanding the complexities of Indian secularism and the application of the concept to Indian society, given that India has not been exposed to the kinds of debates about the church and state divide in pre-modern Europe. See for instance Dipesh Chakrabarty, Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2002); T. N. Madan, Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Partha Chatterjee, “Secularism and Toleration,” Economic and Political Weekly, (9 July 1994): 1768-1777.
non-official non-modern expressions of subjectivity, which for Nandy need to be addressed.

Although these tensions between a traditional and modern self are characteristic of the post-colonial condition, these concerns regarding India’s postcoloniality need to be worked through if the viability of secularism is to be seriously addressed. Equally important is an understanding of the way in which these tensions have been over-played in Indian politics. For Nandy, these tensions have been appropriated by the Indian state to consolidate authentic concepts of tolerance, of Indianness, and Indian modernity. What is problematic about this is that secularism, as a dominant and imposed ideal, forecloses expressions of subjectivity and tolerance. According to Nandy, other expressions of subjectivity and tolerance, particularly non-modern forms, exist latently and, more importantly, constitute the underside of Indian political culture. Since the European meaning of secularism is conceptually laden with its historical foundations elsewhere, it can have little relevance to the concepts of toleration and of Indianness he wishes to theorise. As Nandy claims, “the European meaning of Secularism would make little sense to the average Indian rooted in a religious world view and not exposed to the kinds of debate the church-state divide produced in pre-modern Europe.”

The Indian meaning, in contrast to this, acknowledges that even when a state claims to be tolerant of religions, this does not necessarily lead to religious tolerance in society. Official secular tolerance instituted in and through the secular Indian state may safeguard the survival of a political community in times of crisis, or in the short term. It

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9 Nandy’s critique of India’s postcoloniality and the ways that the post-colonial condition can be worked through are reoccurring themes across his work. Notably the complexities of the post-colonial condition are theorised at length in Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). This text, published in 1983, is widely celebrated as significant within the then emerging, though now established, inter-disciplinary field of postcolonial studies. Elsewhere theorists like Leela Gandhi have also acknowledged the complexities of this task, in understanding and addressing the postcolonial condition. Gandhi offers a valuable overview and critique of postcolonial studies, warning against the pitfalls of postcolonial critique in Leela Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998). As she states, “in the main the controversy surrounding postcolonial vocabulary underscores an urgent need to distinguish and clarify the relationship between the material and analytic cognates of postcolonial studies. In its more self-reflexive moments, postcolonial studies respond to this need by postulating itself as a theoretical attempt to engage with a particular historical condition. The theory may be named postcolonialism and the condition it addresses is best conveyed through the notion of postcoloniality. And whatever the controversy surrounding the theory, its value must be judged in terms of its adequacy to conceptualise the complex condition which attends to the aftermath of colonial occupation.” Leela Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory (1998): 3

10 According to Nandy this claim was recognised by the anti-colonial Indian elite, including freedom fighters, who saw the need for broad-based mobilisation, whilst acknowledging the incompatibility of this Western meaning of secularism for their religious society. Refer to Ashis Nandy, “An Anti-Secular Manifesto” in Romance of the State (2002): 35.
is, however, the Indian community and peoples, which ensure its coherence, meaningfulness and lifeline over a longer period of time. For Nandy, the meaning attached to tolerance is deeply imbedded within the individual and collective psychological and cultural practices of everyday Indians. To this extent these pre-modern or non-modern expressions of toleration and accounts of selfhood have much to contribute. Nandy acknowledges that both definitions of secularism have co-existed within Indian political culture. This is qualified further when he claims that, “in recent years, the nature of the democratic process in India is forcing the political actors to choose between the two meanings.”¹¹ Whether this can be considered a choice is debatable, given that changing dynamics within Indian politics have consistently reinforced a dominant ideal that “secularism is India’s destiny.”¹² What Nandy takes issue with is that this destiny, including its foundations and its viability, remains largely unchallenged. The debates of secularism that do take place, even within the context of what is now widely accepted is a crisis in Indian secularism, tend to focus upon how this destiny should unfold.¹³ Most conceptual arguments are focused upon re-instating this ideal and, hence, the dominant status of the secular ideal within political culture remains unchallenged. The dominance of a secular modernity as the only possible political ideal, along with the viability of this ideal, is therefore radically undermined. Nandy rejects this ideal, and in the process distinguishes himself from these existing perspectives consolidating a secular India. In Nandy’s analysis, the fact that the Indian state is able to play the role of the impartial arbiter with respect to the question of tolerance is naïve and “now a pious hope.”¹⁴ The rejection of this ideal, including the pursuit of this ideal as destiny, is supported by an additional confronting claim. For despite the rapid growth of the power of the Indian state, and processes of secularisation over the last two decades, there are distinct limits to the state’s capacity to secularise society.

¹¹ This can also be read as a lament for the loss of possibility in terms of identifying with and negotiating between these two positions. As Nandy says, “…one could [previously] follow the logic of the second, more local meaning of secularism in Indian politics, while paying lip-service to the first.” Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State (2002): 35.
¹³ For a discussion on what is now widely accepted as the crisis of Indian secularism, see Needham, Anurandha Dingwaney and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, eds., The Crisis of Secularism in India, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
¹⁴ As Nandy states, “the trite once popular slogan, ‘We are Indians first, and then Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs,’ may have become a means of condemning certain communities, but cannot make moral sense to most Indians.” Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State (2002): 35.
It is in response to this official definition of a western and abstract concept of secularism, and the means by which its dominant and normative status is achieved, that Nandy’s confrontation and subsequent anti-secularism can be located. This secular ideal and/or destiny have subjugated individual and collective consciousness and the expression of subjectivities in particular ways. Again, it is worth emphasising that for Nandy these are complex historical, cultural and psychological issues. He proceeds by acknowledging that, “since Indians first began to borrow this ideology in the 1830s, the ideology has also dominated modern Indian consciousness.”\(^{15}\) This precarious relationship between a pre-modern and modern consciousness has, at times, been exhausted by the state. As Nandy explains, the Indian State has actively intervened and even legislated to enforce modes of compliance with this secular consciousness and processes of identification. The assumption operating, and that Nandy claims still has currency today, is that the ideology of secularism in its more absolutist mould would “cut down to size” India’s more vocal minorities unwilling to conform to the ideal.\(^{16}\) Alternatively expressed, these processes of subjection operating within the psychic life of secularism would successfully, and completely make over, minority identities. Despite portraying this stronghold of secularism at the level of the state, and even at the level of individual and collective consciousness, Nandy is unwilling to accept that the psychic life of power and processes of subjection have fully succeeded in their aims of (re)making a modern secular India. While these processes of subjection dominate political identities, he is unwilling to concede that these processes of secularisation and social engineering are complete.

Nandy’s autonomy of thought is demonstrated in what he concedes is an “embarrassing fact.”\(^{17}\) The fact is that there is a growing suspicion of this dominant western concept of secularism. This suspicion is evident in the dissenting accounts of

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\(^{16}\) Examples of this kind of intervention include arguments for a universal civil code and abolishing religion-based affirmative action. This view also has support from what are deemed hard-line or genuine secularists, who claim that secularism within India has appeased minorities at its own detriment. They argue that more hard line support and implementation of the ideology of secularism is needed in order to address the current crisis of Indian secularism. For a discussion of these issues refer to Ashis Nandy, *Romance of the State* (2002): 36. See also Upendra Baxi, “Citing Secularism in the Uniform Civil Code: A ‘Riddle Wrapped Inside an Enigma?’” and Flavia Agnes, “The Supreme Court, the Media and the Uniform Civil Code Debate in India,” both published in Anurandha Dugganay and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, eds., *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, (2007).  
\(^{17}\) Nandy argues “now we suddenly confront the embarrassing fact that not only many Indians but a significant proportion of humankind has become suspicious of the western concept of secularism and become receptive to non-secular ideas of religious and cultural tolerance.” Ashis Nandy, *Romance of the State* (2002): 36.
tolerance and concepts of Indianness that have not disappeared from view, but that exist as threatening reminders. They are dissenting, peripheral and even latent views and practices, because they exist outside of the established normative boundaries of an Indian secular culture. Constituted outside of Indian secular culture, these views and practices are officially outside of politics. Situated at the borderlands of political culture, these dissenting views, values, practices and subjectivities remain deeply threatening and disruptive to established norms. For Nandy, these dissenting views and practices are deeply imbedded in practices of religious and cultural amity. These accounts of toleration are less mechanically imposed because they co-exist alongside accounts of Indianness, seldom recognised as of political value. What is significant is that such concepts of toleration are actuated not through an external and abstract ideology, but are intimately connected to the boundaries of selfhood. There is a pluralisation and recovery of ambivalence, attached to the concept of toleration given that it is constituted within subjectivity. There is recognition that unlike official accounts, “toleration can wear so many entirely other faces.”

This reading of tolerance performs two important functions within the essay.

Firstly, it locates the question of tolerance within the complexities of subjectivity, and by extension within the self/other dyad. The tolerance for others and how that tolerance is expressed, including its limits, references an internal capacity connected to the complexities of subjectivity. Tolerance for others is constituted in relational terms and as something predicated upon the positioning of the boundaries of self. For Nandy, it is also situated within the expressions of Indianness he wishes to retrieve and bring back into view. This dissenting tolerance, he claims, is an already present feature, internal to Indian culture and traditions.

The second role that this concept of tolerance performs in this critique is to radically challenge the viability and efficacy of these externally and mechanically imposed concepts of toleration. Despite official accounts, for Nandy the question of tolerance operating in Indian society has less to do with abstract political ideals and ideological formations. Instead, tolerance is situated within questions of subjectivity. The psychoanalytic features of this argument, including Nandy’s intellectual sensitivity

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18 Don Miller’s work explores this idea that toleration contains multiple meanings and significance. As he suggests, “It [toleration] may be confusion, uncertainty, doubt; it may be fear, deference, weakness, compliance; it may be self-confidence, assurance, mastery; it may be paternalism, even derision; it may be neglect; it may be preordained to bear.” Don Miller, *The Reason of Metaphor: A Study in Politics*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992):172.
for theorising at the level of these external and internal boundaries, are unequivocally made. It is worth restating the point that Nandy’s dissenting account of tolerance, for others and otherness, can be distinguished by its analytic foundations. For as he affirms, “it is closer to the concept of understanding, and presumes cultural interdependency of the kind which encourages that tolerance of others because that tolerance represents the tolerance of less acceptable aspects of one’s own self.”

Before the potential merits of this psychoanalytic reading of tolerance can be assessed, along with its threatening and disruptive features, the ways that the secular ideal operates and defines politics needs to be characterised more fully. How does the ideology of secularism and its claims of official toleration define politics? How does the ideology of secularism define political identities and processes of identification operating in Indian politics? Moreover, how does Nandy work through his growing suspicion of secularism in order, as I claim, to confront the boundaries underpinning political culture? In short, how does Nandy confront and work through the inclusions and exclusions that define a dominant Indian political culture and political identities, central to the anti-secular position advanced?

2.2 Making the Ideal Political Subject

Consistent with the psychoanalytic focus of “An Anti-Secular Manifesto,” Nandy builds the argument that the real power of the ideology is found within processes of subjection. In Nandy’s analysis Indian political culture is formed through the operation of this secular ideal and through processes of subjection. As he states, “this India does have sufficient exposure to the ideology of the state to be able to internalise the concept of secularism and sections of it are willing to go to any length to ensure that the concept is not questioned...[for] there are plenty of Indians now who are willing to sacrifice the unmanageable, chaotic, real-life Indians for the sake of the idea of India.” This ego ideal and its accompanying fantasy structure are further supported by the institutions of the state, and through the secular ethos and official ideology of the state. For example, concepts of national security and national integration are also defined in relation to this secular ideal, and moreover, through the continuing pursuit of it. The real power of the ideology is actuated within processes of socialisation and, in Butler’s terms, through

processes of subjection where identities are formed and made over in accordance with this secular ideal. The concept of subjection denotes more than processes of social engineering though, for these processes are central to the becoming of a politically recognised subject. As Butler writes, “on this understanding, subjection is the paradoxical effect of a regime of power in which the very ‘conditions of existence,’ the possibility of continuing as a recognizable social [and political] being, requires the formation and maintenance of the subject in subordination.” For Nandy, the effects of these processes of subjection are evident in the ways in which a hierarchical ordering of the subject as citizen emerges within Indian public life. These processes of subjection result in a hierarchical ordering of the subject as politically recognised citizen. This typology is expressed in four distinct types, and is fundamental to understanding the inclusions and exclusions operating within Indian politics. Consistent with India’s inheritance of a secular modernity, the ideal subject in public life (and the one validated within this political culture as the true secular citizen) is one who displays the characteristics of a non-believer in public and in private. Nandy cites Jawaharlal Nehru, the secular statesman, as the ideal and much idealised secular subject, and in doing so also emphasises the complexities of subjectivity. It is no coincidence theorists like Don Miller have suggested that these Indian secular values were “laid down by Jawaharlal Nehru, the last Englishman to rule India.” In Nandy’s depiction, Nehru’s public commitment to secularism, as is the case with all ideal types and idealised images, can never fully be realised. In addition, the boundaries between the pre-modern and modern self cannot always be necessarily resolved or so neatly cast within such fixed identity categories. For Nandy, Nehru even with his Anglo-Saxon credentials was unable to live up to this ego ideal in totality, especially in his private life. In his role as a statesman within public life, he came close to fulfilling this ideal in his unwavering commitment to the integrative features of secularism in Indian politics and for India’s national identity. Consistent with this ideal political subject type, the concept of tolerance also takes on a specific meaning where, subject to the operation of the ideal, “tolerance is definitionally the prerogative of one who has some western education, and some exposure to modernity, especially the modern idiom of politics.” As Nandy affirms, this establishes a distinct boundary point of identification, and differentiation between

the ideal tolerant secular political citizen and those others who fall outside; those left outside of these boundaries are *abjected* from view and cast away from politics, as disruptive and threatening reminders of a pre-modern or even non-modern India.

In contrast to this, the least favoured subject and least recognised within Indian political culture is the non-modern figure that threatens these processes of identification. This subject type is, by definition, a believer in private and in public life. For Nandy, this deviation from the ideal secular subject, is best exemplified by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The challenge that Gandhi posed was that his politics, methods, political identity and self-representation were intimately tied to the cosmologies of faith, pre-modern traditions and cultural practices. Articulated within the vernacular of religiosity, Gandhi’s politics and calls for *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) do not comply with a secular political ontology. In Nandy’s account, Gandhi’s presence within Indian politics challenges the normative political subject, and brings with it the possibility of re-conceiving politics in very different terms. This deviation from the secular ideal, along with Gandhi’s own critique of modernity, is significant in Nandy’s own critique of secularism, and is noted in a number of places in his work.

Gandhi’s subjectivity and his presence within Indian politics challenge and re-position the boundaries of politics within very different terms. For Nandy political consciousness, if it were to retain its creative force (that is, both its disruptive and regenerative possibilities), would need to acknowledge these religious cosmologies, traditions and faiths of these least favoured Indian citizens. There is a mode of dissent,

26 Nandy details Gandhi’s alternative reading of politics at length in “An Anti-Secular Manifesto,” particularly through his reading of Gandhi’s political identity as representative of the non-modern peripheral in Indian political culture. Aspects of Gandhi’s reading of politics are explored further in two places, in the later part of the dissertation. The first place is in Chapter 6, *Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics*, where Gandhi’s contributions to redefining politics as a post-secular awareness are considered. The second place is in Chapter 8, *From Phobic Object to Analytic Mode: Resisting Abjection*, where I explore Nandy’s argument that Gandhi’s politics and political identity disrupts a masculine colonial code.
27 This question of maintaining a creative force or dynamic within political consciousness is a re-occurring theme in Nandy’s work. I afford this theme greater attention in *PART C* of the dissertation,
evident in Gandhi’s defiance that he celebrates as both disruptive and simultaneously creative. This is consistent with the idea that any mode of dissenting consciousness must not become another, “reformist sect within modernity.”

There are two further typologies that Nandy explores. Deviating from Nehru’s archetypal image is the non-believer in public and believer in private. This subjectivity is relatively benign within Indian political culture. This subject position is less threatening because, consistent with secular norms, there is a clear division between public and private, secular and non-secular. Thus, the dominant secular ideal is upheld in public life, and the established boundaries that constitute political culture remain unchallenged. For Nandy, this divided public/private self is generally accepted as part of the contradictory features of being quintessentially Indian. Next in this typology of ideal political citizen, but before Gandhi’s disruptive position, is the subject who is a believer in public and non-believer in private. This is an altogether more threatening position, and Nandy explores this in a number of writings, particularly in his critique of Hindu Nationalism. This subject types proves a different challenge to the secular ideal and confirms the ways that the ideal and these processes of subjection ultimately work against its own aims. What is problematic, is not the issue of taking on religious identities, but the processes of re-making religious identities into political ones. Figures like V.D.Savarkar, as the founding ideological father of Hindutva and pan-Hindu Nationalism, along with his reformist political agenda of making India Hindu, represent the dangers of this political identity. What is interesting is that political identities like Savarkar’s (a believer in public and non-believer in private) remain within this dominant political culture as less threatening and closer to the ideal than a figure like Gandhi. For it is Gandhi’s commitment to a religious way of life in private and public, his resistance to processes of subjection, and his explicit transversal of the secular ideal that remain threatening and destabilising.

Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic, where this is considered alongside a characterisation of Nandy’s mode of critique.

29 For Nandy, Savarkar’s question of ‘Who is a Hindu?’ and who then has claims over an Indian Hindu nation is less a metaphysical questioning, and more a politicisation of Hinduism; a re-making of Hinduism into a political identity category. This politicisation of Hinduism or, alternatively expressed, the re-making of Hinduism into a political identity, is evident in the ways in which the ideology of Hindutva has been imperative to the political claims and identity of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). See V. D. Savarkar, Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? (Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2003 [1923]); Y. K. Malik and V. B. Singh, Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
Nandy’s analysis of these processes of subjection identifies four distinct political subject types operating in Indian politics. In identifying these political subjectivities, he then confronts the effectiveness of the ideal in keeping religion out of politics. For religion does not necessarily disappear from political view. In Nandy’s account, religion now returns carrying the weight of these processes of subjection. This, for Nandy, is where the pathologies of secularism reveal themselves, in these processes of re-making religious identities into political identities. Furthermore, these remade political identities foster the conditions for social and political discontent. Theorists like Saba Mahmood, writing in a different context, have taken this confrontation with the psychic life of secularism further. Mahmood, in her critique of secularism, notes that, “the political solution that secularism proffers…lies not so much in tolerating differences and diversity but in remaking certain kinds of religious subjectivities (even if this requires the use of violence) so as to render them compliant with liberal political rule.”

Nandy’s own claims regarding the changing dynamics of social and political intolerance lead to a similar conclusion. However, the clues to these dynamics are also evident in this hierarchy of the subject and the political value afforded these subjectivities. What is problematic is that the range of possible subjectivities and concepts of Indianness represented in public life and within politics are truncated. Equally, what is foreclosed from analysis is the complexity of human subjectivity. This complexity includes the ways in which contradictions, ambivalence and ambiguities within subjectivity can challenge these divisions between a public and private life. Official secularism of this kind, in which the ideal secular citizen is, rewarded as a true Indian, compromise democratic processes by truncating the political personality of the citizen. As Nandy’s analysis affirms, only a part of oneself is represented in politics. This representation of self in politics can be noted as the acceptable parts of self, whilst those other parts have to be carefully kept outside of it, and, in its ideal manifestation, are not even expressed in private life. These inherited and imported divisions of self-organisation and representation work to re-structure what he claims are the more porous boundaries of selfhood. For Nandy, these porous boundaries of selfhood are a crucial feature of human subjectivity. They are also found culturally within the concepts of Indianness he is interested in re-claiming. Consistent with this hierarchy and psychic organisation, the believer in public life is deemed as having an “inferior political

consciousness." Nandy’s objection is that this subject type is cast as inferior, and that the psychic life of power forecloses a particular internal dialogue from taking place. As he explains, “instead of a dialogue between the public and private within a person – and between politics and culture – the two spheres are rigidly separated and the latter is frozen in time.”

2.3 Defending the Dominant and Normative Secular Ideal: The Role of the Vanguard

Nandy identifies two dominant secular modernist trends in India; that continue today as effects and affects of this dominant and normative secular ideal. The first is a belief that eventually faith and culture, even within the private spheres of life, will be eroded and supplanted by science, rationality and modern education. The second is that this will then pave the way for the efficient and effective running of the sanitised sphere of politics and public life already discussed. The indirect message carried forward within these processes and attitudes is the need to educate, modernise, civilise and secularise. In Nandy’s analysis, “the theory [of secularism] is an indirect plea to educate, guide and break in the citizenry into this secular sphere, the sphere of the raja dharma, with the help of a modern vanguard acting as a pace-setter in matters of social change.”

The vanguard as the ideal political subject is by definition educated, westernised and middle class and performs a vital function in modelling and consolidating the identity of the rational secular political actor. The modus operandi of the vanguard is, therefore, to ensure that the irrational and now pathological expressions of religion and ethnicity (fundamentalism, fanaticism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism…) remain at the borderlands of politics.

Although Nandy is critical of the role that the vanguard plays in preserving the secular ideal, he does acknowledge the role the vanguard can perform in preserving a sphere of collective sanity and/or social order. The vanguard can perform an integrative

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31 Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State, (2002): 37. The exceptions to this claim of an inferior political consciousness are movements like Hindu nationalism which have succeeded in (re)creating themselves as a political identity, and not a religious identity. Hence, such movements, despite their appropriations of distinct religious motifs, myths and symbols, do so as reconstituted political identities. The processes of re-making religious identities into political ones, as evidenced in the case of the rise of Indian Hindu nationalism are explored in the following chapter. See Chapter 3, Ambivalence and Contradiction: Containing Concepts of Indianness.

32 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 37.

33 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 40.
function in safeguarding the normative boundaries operating within political culture. For Nandy, the value of the integrative function that the vanguard can perform becomes necessary within contexts of political crisis, and within isolated historical events, where social and political cohesion has been needed. For instance, he acknowledges that during the formation of the Independent Nation State in 1947, the vanguard had a distinctive role to play in instituting the ideology of secularism. Nandy acknowledges the consensus surrounding secularism, and its symbolic function as an ego-integrative ideal, during the establishment of nation. In this instance, the ideology of secularism is intimately tied to questions of national identity, and to consolidating the boundaries of the Indian nation state. The ideology proffered by the vanguard contributed to safeguarding national integration and unity following the violence, the mass displacement of peoples and fragmentation experienced during the Partition of India. Nandy concedes that this consensus was vital in “that an area of sanity needed to be maintained in the polity” and that this sanity came in the form of the Nehruvian consensus.34 The point remains, though, that this kind of consensus, crucial as it was in establishing a political imaginary and in creating a collective political consciousness, has reached its limits. The limits of state secularism have now been reached in Nandy’s depiction with detrimental consequences. The contemporary pursuit of national unity and an Indian national identity has homogenised and standardised concepts of tolerance. The pathologies of secularism that he warns against, and confronts in his critique of secularism, are evident in these processes of homogenisation and standardisation.

Defending secularism and the secular ideal, including justifying the pursuit of the ideal is becoming a more complex undertaking. In Nandy’s account there are three changes within Indian political culture that further have complicated the viability of this ideal. Firstly, political participation has expanded and it is no longer possible to screen those entering politics according to their subordination to the secular ideal, their secular morality or ideal citizen rating. This expanded participation has brought with it democratic representation from what was once considered the “ethnic backwaters of

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34 Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 40. The Nehruvian consensus, also described by Rajeev Dhavan as the “the Great Discourse,” was founded on science, secularism and socialism. This consensus dominated administrative and political society and the ideological apparatus of the Indian State during this time. See Rajeev Dhavan, “The Sound of Thunder,” *Seminar*, (394) (June 1992): 31-34.
For Nandy unequivocally, “democratisation itself has set limits on the secularisation of Indian politics.” Indian democracy, along with concepts of democratic pluralism, has been strengthened, empowered and rejuvenated by these expansion processes. For Nandy, these expansion processes have proven resilient against the normative and homogenising features of statist secularism. This argument is consistent with his broader intellectual efforts to explore subjectivities and recover the critical features of ambivalence, diversity and pluralism within Indian democracy. The second and more destabilising change, following on from this expanded political representation, is that these new voices and political identities entering public life create new conditions. This provides the conditions for the political use of religion and ethnicity in politics, “turning it into an instrument of political mobilisation within a psophocratic model.”

The danger for Nandy is that while religious traditions and ethnicity have found political currency in pathological form (as re-constituted homogenised political identities), this has not been accompanied by a greater tolerance of faiths. Further, these processes of expansion have not been accompanied with the checks needed against corruption and violence in public life. What now passes as faith in public life is not expressed in the language of the sacred, but as an impoverished version of itself, manipulated for political ends. Nandy laments the ways in which religion returns and enters into political culture, by accepting, what are, the terms and conditions of subjection. The effect of this return is that it is a compromised return, as something is forsaken within this re-made concept of religion. For under the guises of both the zealot and the western secularist the return of religion is reduced to the “status

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35 Nandy references these ordinary peripheral believers or non-modern peripherals as “eking out their lives in the backwaters of South Asia in the ways in which such people eke out their lives throughout the South.” Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State, (2002): 46.

36 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 41.

37 I address these themes in greater detail in the later part of the dissertation. In Chapter 6, Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics, I discuss Nandy’s emphasis on diversity and pluralism within Indian democracy, as a means of countering the pathologies of secularism. In Chapter 7, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention, I characterise the methods that Nandy adopts in order to generate perspectives that critique subjectivities.

38 Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State (2002): 41. The prime example of this process is the politicisation of the Sri Rama, by the forces of Hindutva as a truism in Indian politics. This is reiterated by the electoral strategy and slogan of the BJP of “they know it we know it.” For a discussion of this process refer to the chapter titled “Mapping the Secular” in Rustom Bharucha, In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 5.

39 Nandy further distinguishes the appropriation of religion for political ends by noting that these accounts of religion lack a theory of transcendence. “By projecting into history the conceptual grid of the European Enlightenment and dishonestly claiming them as part of the secular worldview, Indian secularists have participated in an ethnocidal project the direct results of which are the impoverished versions of faiths that have come to dominate Indian public life.” See Ashis Nandy, Romance of the State (2002): 50.
This comes with a third development within Indian political culture. Since the 1960s there has been an increasing disenchantment with secularism expressed in the growing frustrations and scepticism of the blind faith that it demands from its followers. Confronting what is assumed to be India’s political destiny, Nandy cautions that, “western style secularisation has shown incapacity to keep pace with politicisation in this part of the world, and it shows no sign of being able to do so in the future.”

This incapacity of secularism has ensured that, “ethnicity is refusing to obliquely sing its swan song. “ It is, though, through the pathologies of secularism, in fanaticism and extremism, that ethnicity and religion made over, and now re-cast as political identities, are finding political expression and currency in detrimental ways.

2.4 The Boundaries of Self: Political Personality and Tolerating Difference

The question of tolerance is connected to accounts of selfhood and the formation of political identities. Nandy’s critique of the state’s hegemony over concepts of official tolerance, and its increasing inability to safeguard communal amity, enable him to explore the conditions for a dissenting concept of tolerance. This concept of toleration is already present for Nandy, notably as a latent presence, surviving as the underside of Indian political culture. This is secularism not defined in opposition to the sacred, but in opposition to the “ethnocentrism, xenophobia and fanaticism,” that is increasingly finding political currency and support.

For Nandy, figures like Gandhi, despite his less than ideal status, have something to contribute to theories of tolerance and inter-religious harmony. Unlike the social basis of western secularism that is linked to the statist model, a Gandhian approach to tolerance shifts the emphasis, “from outer to inner incentives.” There is within Gandhi’s critique of modes of toleration a questioning of the boundaries between public and private, external and internal. Official tolerance is the prerogative of the state, and implemented instrumentally through its workings as an external reference point for social and political cohesion. In contrast, the tolerance that Nandy advocates is disconnected from modern statecraft. In a similar vein to Gandhi’s approach, Nandy locates the question of tolerance internally and externally, with an emphasis on the dialogue that needs to take place between these internal and external

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40 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 43.
41 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 43.
42 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 43.
43 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 43.
registers. For, as Nandy emphasises, the concept of tolerance that he is interested in working with is located as both internal to the self and to culture. The dangers are that these internal capacities, along with the capacity for dialogue between these internal and external registers, are being foreclosed by the peripheral and fanatical voices now accepted as religion in politics. The effects of these processes are, then, that these excluded and unofficial expressions of tolerance continue to be cast from view despite their latent presence as a critical underside of Indian political culture. Consistent with Nandy’s interests in inner incentives, his account of tolerance seeks to engage and work with this latent aspect.

The reading of processes of subjection and its relationship to concepts of tolerance has much to contribute to an understanding of ethnicity and its representation in contemporary Indian politics. Nandy explains that, “the clash between modernity and religious traditions in much of Asia and Africa elicits from each culture four political responses to ethnicity.” These four responses to ethnicity found in a number of postcolonial societies, are described as “half ideal-types and half mythic structures.” These responses provide further insight into these processes of subjection, and the inner incentives of what Nandy identifies as the ethnic personality in politics. The four subject types and the responses available within Indian political culture for addressing questions of ethnicity are the following: western-man as the ideal political man; the westernised native; the zealot; and the non-modern peripheral ethnic. The analysis of the limited possibilities available for addressing ethnicity in Indian secular political culture advances Nandy’s argument that secularism ultimately works against its own aims. What he emphasises is that this is a compromised position. Moreover, the ideology of secularism provides the political conditions for the proliferation of intolerance and communal violence.

2.4.1 Western man as the ideal political man

The first of these responses, Nandy suggests, has little in common with the other three responses but is noteworthy in its own right. The western man as the ideal political man is a familiar cultural archetype and central to the victory of western colonialism.

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45 Nandy explains that these “responses are neither exclusive nor orthogonal to each other, though they often seem so, for they are half ideal-types, half mythic structures.” See Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 43.
The imago of the western man armed with a rational and secular mindset, and modern and progressive ideals is central to the successes of the West. According to these markers of modernity, he or she stands in direct opposition to the non-western man, and in this sense, is a reminder of the non-West’s failure to westernise. To what extent is this image psychically powerful and successful in structuring identities? Nandy suggests this ideal is an illusion or, as he prefers, a shadow, given that the non-Western man does not recognise himself and his identity as positioned within this dyad. This shadow image is pivotal though to processes of identification, and moreover the range of possible political identities available in these societies. The western man despite his/her mythical status, remains the central reference point for all to aspire to the construction of successful and progressive political identities. As Nandy explains, “the shadowy western man then becomes a critique of the Indigenous personality as well as a projection of the ego-ideal of these sections of the indigenous population.”

The projection of the ego ideal, part of the precarious process of psychic organization, both at the individual and collective levels, is not without repercussions. Nandy does not critique the function of an ego ideal here, but rather notes that the operation of this ego ideal is problematic. The ego ideal is, for Nandy, derived from an external cultural source and, as already detailed, has its historic foundations within the traditions of western enlightenment and modernity. This “Enlightenment consciousness is [and remains] complicit with the violence, uprooting, and the de-culturation they have confronted in their lives or in their pasts of their communities.” These aspirations to identify with this ego ideal within societies have often been met with violent and tragic ends. Subjection to this ideal has repercussions beyond individual identity and political consciousness, and has a direct impact on shaping communities and societies in profound ways. As Nandy argues, “If the sections are powerful, they may even manage to set up this sectorial ideal as the ideal for the entire society.” In such cases a new euphsychia emerges, a utopian personality that sets the benchmark for identity and identity politics. This too becomes a tool for homogenisation and compliance, as this

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eupsychia functions as a critique of the indigenous personality and stands in opposition to the traditional eupsychias surviving in that society. The point of contention is again about the ways in which this eupsychia affirms a dominant and homogenising imagining. While this eupsychia performs an integrative function, it also forecloses other possibilities; especially existing traditional or even non-modern eupsychias whose reference point is not western man.

There are certain characteristic personality traits that accompany this subjectivity. These traits include a rational pragmatism in political matters and in affirming the rational political subject. These traits are also demonstrated in the managerial attitude adopted in response to ethnic and religious tensions in which the business of nation-building and national unity takes precedence, and involves hard decisions and realism in dealing with ethnic minorities. Nandy questions whether these efforts to politically manage differences and diversity within a poly-ethnic and poly-religious Indian democracy ultimately differ from that model of governance it goes to such lengths to distance itself from - a theocratic state. As Nandy argues, under either system the status afforded diversity and the political status of minorities bears a striking family resemblance. In either scenario “minorities face the prospect of being westernised – the usual euphemism is modernised – in a western-style nation state.”

Nation-building (in conjunction with the modernising project) if it is to succeed requires the hard decisions, the Realpolitik and managerial style of this personality – Western political man. However, the political status of ethnic minorities under the influence of the Western political man is no different to that of an ethnic majority. It entails compliance with these normative processes of subjection.

2.4.2 The westernised native

The second possible response to ethnicity is from the westernised native. This is the subject who, in these processes of becoming, does so by successfully internalising the imago of western man, thus accepting the conditions of subjection. The experiences of the westernised native, and the ambivalence that these processes of internalisation entail.
generate, have been written about extensively by a number of theorists. This is the story of the native or ethnic who has internalised the ideology of their oppressors and now carries the intimate enemy within the boundaries of self. The psychic life of power or the colonisation of the mind, to follow through on Frantz Fanon’s axiom, however, brings with it distinct notions of a divided and alienated self. These internalised beliefs regarding the desire to modernise or universalise one’s own culture by identifying with the coloniser take place alongside a number of inner contradictions. Although the westernised man may also experience this internal conflict and ambiguity, to some extent this is consistent with a more general existential conflict. The westernised native differs, though, in that they are confronted with ambivalence and contradiction of a different kind. The disjunction arises because the ego ideal of the western man, that the western native internalises, can never be fully realised within his or her society. The painful disjuncture between this internal (mis)recognition with an external experience, which mirrors a different reality back to the self, can become overwhelming and consuming. One possible defensive response to this potential loss of ontological security is in the over-determined desire to modernise and secularise one’s own regressive native culture, including the regressive parts of one’s self. This defensive response takes place as an attempt to counter this loss or a pending disaster of possible abjection.

The other tension within this subject position is whether the cultural self, already established in tension and contradiction with this political self, can be abjected and cast from view. In re-affirming the ambivalence, radical alterity and contradictions within all human subjectivity, Nandy points to the ways in which these tensions reveal themselves even within the seemingly fixed identity of the ideal westernised native. He takes the example of the Secular Statesman Jawaharlal Nehru who, as already discussed, represents the ideal political secular citizen, the non-believer in public and private. However, within the imago of Nehru as the Secular Statesman, Nandy builds a

52 For example, in this work of Homi K. Bhabha these processes of internalisation have been critiqued in terms of their creative possibilities and destructive features, as the paradoxical and ambivalent conditions of postcoloniality. See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture. (London: Routledge, 1994).
53 The colonisation of the mind has been evocatively detailed in the work of Frantz Fanon Black Skin, White Masks. (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Albert Memmi, The Coloniser and the Colonised (New York: The Orion Press, 1965); Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). The problems of identifying with the oppressor are considered further in my discussion of Nandy’s text The Intimate Enemy in Chapter 8, From Phobic Object to Psychoanalytic Mode: Resisting Abjection.
secondary argument around the question of ambivalence, contradictions and conflicts of
the westernised native. Nandy captures this ambivalence within subjectivity when
emphasising that Nehru, “in his weaker moments, gave in to astrologers and tantrics of
all hues.” These are weaker moments because they represent a deviation from the
established boundaries of a normative secular political subject. By turning to tantrics,
Nehru is also turning to, or rather expressing a part of his cultural self, and it is this
aspect of self that threatens these processes of subjection. Further, these parts of a
cultural self threaten and undermine the ontological security that the ideal political
subject safeguards.

The point for Nandy is not to detract from the significance of Nehru as a secular
political figure, but to highlight that the ego ideal does not allow for the interplay
between these contradictions and ambiguities in representations of his political
personality. A similar point can be made about the Indian religious, social and
educational reformer Rammohun Roy who, as Nandy explains, was known to take a
Brahmin cook with him to England to observe his personal food taboos after a life-long
defiance of Hindu caste codes. Such contradictions within these political personalities
become all the more arresting, given that parts of this cultural self are revealed only in
the personal sphere. It is no coincidence that the personal sphere becomes the site for
this unravelling, especially given that such figures in public have fought tirelessly for
India’s secular identity, a modern Indian secular state, and a secular political culture in
public life. There is for Nandy, though, a distinctive turning against one’s own cultural
self in order to secure this idealised political identity and the boundaries of politics. The
point remains that even in the making of successful and celebrated political identities,
psychic life and the boundaries of self cannot always be so neatly defined. The certainty
and security cannot even be secured by figures like Nehru, whose public image and
personality was secured by his commitment to scientific rationality, reason and secular
modernity. However in Nandy’s analysis, Nehru’s subjectivity betrays this idealised
image. Central to Nandy’s confrontation with the secular ideal is to explore the ways
that contradictions and ambivalence within subjectivity find recourse in psychic life.
The cultural self is not, and arguably cannot be, fully cast away or repressed from view;

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55 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 45.
for even in subtle ways, parts of the self always find recourse within the timelessness of psychic life.\textsuperscript{56}

Although the westernised native and western man may share the same ego ideal, they can differ politically in their approaches. This difference is discernable in the role that they may perform within their own societies and, therefore, they may also even be political adversaries. With an overriding aim to modernise their own culture they however, share in the European vision of progress and concepts of a good society. Even as adversaries they agree that “the fate of the tropics” is on this pathway of modernisation, westernisation, secularisation and universalisation.\textsuperscript{57} The external challenges the westernised native faces, in addition to the internal ones discussed, are exemplified in the role that they perform in politics. This role performed in politics requires a particular attitude. Armed with a reformist attitude, these internal contradictory tensions must be repressed in order to deal with what are perceived to be “the backward, religious masses” within their own cultures.\textsuperscript{58} These challenges are significant for they can bring forward another disruptive element. More often than not, leading the masses is an “unscrupulous leadership ever willing to take advantage of irrational, superstitious faiths.”\textsuperscript{59} The responses to combat this are to be found in a return to the imago, the internal referent of western political man. The westernised native thus constantly invokes the established (western) eupsychia as a yardstick, in order to compare and contrast the regressive realities of their own non-western culture. Nandy claims that given these processes, and the tacit self-knowledge at play, the westernised native will address religious and ethnic difference as a civilising question. This approach sits alongside the knowledge that they will always fall short of achieving this ideal of civilising the natives into modern subjects. Irrespective of this failure the westernised native, having inscribed these ideals through self and within

\textsuperscript{56} The timelessness of psychic life and of psychic space is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, through the work of Julia Kristeva. In this chapter the concept of the timelessness of psychic life is explored through Kristeva’s psychoanalytic account of revolt. In this chapter, I introduce this aspect of Kristeva’s work to further theorise the psychoanalytic focus in Nandy’s work and its significance for understanding the political and social criticism that he produces. See Chapter 7, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention.

\textsuperscript{57} This expression, “the fate of the tropics,” is taken from the title of Nandy’s book. See Ashis Nandy, \textit{The Romance of the State: And The Fate of Dissent in the Tropics} (2002).

\textsuperscript{58} Nandy argues that there are two main obstacles that the westernised native must contend with. These are: “the backward, religious masses, unexposed to modern scientific rationality, and their unscrupulous leadership, ever willing to take advantage of irrational, superstitious faiths.” See Ashis Nandy, \textit{The Romance of the State} (2002): 45.

\textsuperscript{59} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 45.
cultur, is compelled by these processes to pursue these aspirations and ideals. Nandy concludes that whilst the western native may on some level recognise the conflict and contradiction of their situation, they will continue to submit to these processes as part of an attempt to cast away ambivalence and contradiction. Thus ultimately, the western native continues to work towards consolidating the ontological security derived from these processes of identification and subjection in service of self and for their culture.

2.4.3 The zealot

The third response to ethnicity is that of the zealot, that is the Muslim or Sikh fundamentalist or, in the case of the Hindu, the Hindu Revivalist or Cultural Nationalist. It is important to note that for Nandy, it is the zealot, along with the westernised native, who has had a strong political presence within contemporary Indian politics, particularly since the 1990s. The rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during this period and its militant calls for a Hindu rashtra (nation) has a case to answer for in appropriating religion and ethnicity for political gains. It is also worth noting that the zealot, according to an earlier distinction, may coincide with the political citizen who is a believer in public and non-believer in private. Unlike the westernised native, the internal psychic life of the zealot demonstrates a more overt expression of the inverted aggression found in the westernised native. This aggression in the zealot is expressed as fanaticism, xenophobia and ethnocentrism and is greatly feared by the westernised native who, irrespective of the internal conflict endured, seldom conveys and acts upon this divided subjectivity in public life. The zealot’s impetus for expressing this aggression is markedly different. The zealot’s behaviour, unlike the westernised native, is fuelled by political motivations rather than from a civilizational one. In simple terms, for Nandy, the zealot has turned against their cultural self. The defining characteristic of the zealot is the way that traditions, religions and ethnicity are strategically appropriated for political gains and ends. Religion, traditions, culture and ethnicity become tools for the zealot in a zero-sum game of electoral politics, within what Carse has noted is the

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60 The role of the Hindu nationalist is explored in greater detail in the following chapter as its growing political appeal in the 1990s worked to define concepts of Indianess, national identity and national unity in very specific ways. The point remains that for Nandy the rise of Hindu nationalism is intimately connected to the pathologies of secularism. See Chapter 3, Ambivalence and Contradiction: Containing Concepts of Indianess.
“finite game of politics.” In contrast to the westernised native, the zealot’s aggressive tactics can mobilise people “suffering from an acute case of false consciousness” in different ways. For Nandy, the great threat and danger of the zealot in Indian politics is to be found in the deeply internalised repressions and defences that propel the over-determined and extremist attitudes and responses to religion and ethnicity. Nandy describes the zealot as, “reacting to and yet internalising the humiliation inflicted on all faiths by a triumphant anti-faith called western modernity, [he or she] has accepted the western Enlightenment’s attitude to all faiths, including his own.”

In taking on the western Enlightenment attitude and, despite the claim to faith in public life, the religious beliefs of the masses are an embarrassment to the zealot. The seeming paradox is explained by Nandy as “no accident; [for] the one universal trait of an ideology is always a certain contempt for the targeted beneficiaries of the ideology.” The ethnicity acquired by the zealot in politics is an “ethnicity [that] is skin deep and reactive,” and is in this account another variation of the secular political man of post-Enlightenment Europe. To some extent the zealot shares the internal contradictions of the psychic life of the westernised native, though does so in an exaggerated and more complex way. The zealot externalises this internalised aggression towards the self, projecting this onto the other in ways that differ from the westernised native. What is problematic about this projection of aggression is that the zealot carries an overwhelming level of hatred and disgust that is a distinct feature of his/her political identity. Within these processes of subjection operating to make the zealot into a political subject there is a double level of loathing at play. The zealot demonstrates hatred for the westernised ethnic as having proverbially sold out to western man, and an even deeper hatred for the ordinary pedestrian ethnic and their embarrassing ways. Despite this hatred and embarrassment for the everyday ethnic, this is the constituency that the zealot represents in politics. For Nandy, the zealot and his/her appropriation of religion and ethnicity as a political identity affirm the pathologies of secularism and processes of subjection operating in Indian secular political culture. This explains the similar objectives and goals shared, at least politically, between the westernised Hindu

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62 Nandy draws on this threat when he states, that, “such zealots mostly operate from urban bases and appeal to the semi-modern.” See Ashis Nandy, The Romance of the State (2002): 45.
63 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 45.
64 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 46.
65 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 46.
and westernised Muslim. For Nandy, both are modern identity categories or typologies defined by one’s modern credentials. In the case of the westernised Hindu or the westernised Muslim zealot, it is this modernity that determines political identity, and one’s political status, thus overriding religious and ethnic differences.

2.4.4 The non-modern peripheral ethnic

The final response to ethnicity is that provided by the non-modern peripheral ethnic. The non-modern peripheral ethnic is the most significant subject type in Nandy’s analysis and confrontation with secularism. The ordinary or non-modern peripheral is so named by the zealots and secularists to reflect his/her political status within Indian political culture. There is, however, an advantage to this peripheral status; it demonstrates the subject’s distinctive non-conformity and non-compliance with processes of subjection. Located by definition at the periphery or borderlands of political life, can the non-modern peripheral ethnic even be recognised as a subject? For Nandy the answer to this question is evidenced in the ways in which these are represented as both outside of and irrelevant to a dominant and normative political culture. The non-modern peripheral that is abjected from political view exists within what Kristeva notes are the borderlands of signification.

In Nandy’s reading where this abjection has been challenged is through democratic processes and through expanded political representation. This expanded representation and presence within politics, particularly by people traditionally at the borders of society has necessitated an acknowledgment of these subjectivities. To what extent, though, does this democratic right correlate with the non-modern peripheral’s political status? The non-modern peripheral’s presence in Indian democracy is de-valued and the backwardness of the peripheral ethnic, along with their lack of knowledge of democratic processes, overshadows their status as citizen. Nandy argues that these attitudes and processes of exclusion take place because the status of the non-modern peripheral ethnic remains at the borderlands of signification: the not yet subject. For Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash Nandy’s analysis demonstrates the ways in which, “the non-subjects, who refuse to play the game, are

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disqualified or declared bad subjects.”67 Given this abject status, the non-modern peripheral, cast in Butler’s terms as the bad subject, becomes an important and controversial figure in Nandy’s critique.68 Nandy works to reclaim the disruptive and creative possibilities that the bad subject carries forward. Despite the external condemnation of the bad subject, by both the secularists and zealots, the ordinary peripheral has some internal advantages. In Nandy’s reading there are a number of internal resources that continue to distinguish this subject type from the others explored thus far. These resources include a defiance of norms, but also a very different understanding and representation of self and by extension, self /other relations. This alternative modality of being is privileged in the following way, as he contends that,

…Neither the modern secularist nor the crypto-modern zealot has the sensitivity to stand witness to this other battle of survival. Neither has the time to remember the experience of neighbourliness and co-survival, which characterises the relationship among the peripheral believers of different faiths.69

For Nandy, it is in the non-modern peripheral’s combination of sensitivity and memory of a cultural self that dissenting practices of religious and ethnic tolerance is to be found. There is a dynamic in operation that is internal to both the self and expressions of Indianess and Indian culture. This can also be expressed as an inner resource of survival and co-survival, which Nandy wants to retrieve back into political view.70 Importantly the internal referent for the peripheral ethnic is not western man but an enduring ambivalent cultural self. Shifting the focus in this way enables Nandy to establish this subject position as outside of the other three already discussed. For the non-modern peripheral, tolerance (for self and of others) does not come from official doctrines instituted through modern secular statecraft but from these unofficial modes. This is an account of tolerance that, according to Nandy, has a long established presence

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68 In the second part of the dissertation, PART B, titled Symptomatic Responses Reading the Politics of Blame, I extend on this further by exploring the ways Nandy’s own identity is made over as the bad subject, by certain critics within the debates of secularism.
70 Elsewhere this internal cultural resource has also been described as a hybridising force which maintains an ambivalence and pluralism as a cultural condition. For Shankar Ramaswami this dynamic feature of culture is, in Hindi, expressed as manta, referencing a churning which takes place as a feature of culture. For a discussion of this dynamic refer to Christine Deftereos, Conversations on Ashis Nandy: Shankar Ramaswami with Christine Deftereos (Unpublished Interviews, Delhi: India 2005): 1-6.
and history in the Indic civilisation. Moreover, the non-modern peripheral, armed with these unofficial modes of tolerance, continues to threaten and challenge the boundaries between self and other, tolerance and intolerance, public and private, secular and non-secular. The subjectivity of the peripheral remains defiant against these processes of subjection because, “these grammars survive, in spite of the efforts of learned scholars to read them as folk theologies – as inferior, disposable versions of Hinduism and Islam.”

### 2.5 The Recovery of Tolerance and Democratic Processes

The tolerance that Nandy is interested in exploring is conceptualised as an internal question, within subjectivity. This concept of tolerance is intimately connected to the concept of porous boundaries of self and lies within the pluralism of Indian culture and traditions. Consistent with the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s critique, tolerance is located as an internal question, pertaining to the ways in which both individual and collective boundaries of selfhood are cast. In later work, and following the criticisms of a number of friends, he acknowledges the limitations of the term and suggests hospitality might take us further in capturing the inter-religious amity he has in mind. Nandy also adopts Ivan Illich’s use of the concept conviviality which, in a similar way, re-configures tolerance from within and in support of the practical knowledge of the average citizen. In either case the emphasis is on a pluralisation of the experiences and possibilities of tolerance, derived through a reconstitution of self/other relations. Nandy states that, “hospitality is a recognition or an association, a coming together of an entirely different sort,” for it implies that “in being hospitable; you recognise the plurality of experience.” Hospitality does not imply compliance to a normative view (secular or non-secular), belief or practice but, in broader terms, embraces the ambivalence and ambiguity of the inter-subjective realm. It reconfigures the positioning of the boundaries between self and other, because simply stated, “hosting the others simply means opening one’s arms and doors for them, to accept their existence in their

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72 Nandy’s appropriation of the term carries forward Illich’s own use of the concept in his critique of the institutionalisation of specialised knowledge. For like Illich, Nandy too is addressing the power of political myths or the processes through which specialised knowledge like official accounts of tolerance become dominant and foreclose other possible knowledge and experience, particularly the practical knowledge of the non-modern peripheral Indian. See Ivan Illich, *Tools of Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).
own places...”

This is an entirely different intellectual and psychological task, for opening one’s self up to the possibilities of this hospitality creates a different encounter and even ethical moment in relation to the other. Tolerance, expressed as either hospitality or conviviality, radically challenges and displaces existing understandings of official tolerance. Nandy argues, “it [conviviality] disconnects us as effectively as hospitality does from the baggage that the term secularism carries.”

As has been argued, official accounts of secular tolerance can be compromised in times of expanding representation and participation in politics, especially by the zealot and the westernised native. In contrast to this, the tolerance or hospitality expressed by the non-modern peripheral contributes to a broader understanding of the concept, whilst preserving a dynamism and pluralism within the self and within Indian democracy. Despite attempts to truncate political personality and differences, people do bring their own categories of understanding, self-understanding and representations into “the fray of democratic politics.” The implications are that this pluralism disrupts and ruptures the positioning of the boundaries of political culture. In Nandy’s account these processes of subjection operating in Indian secular political culture come face to face with democratic pluralism and, in doing so, the boundaries of political culture itself come under question. In emphasising these tensions, Nandy asks a series of confronting questions: “And in a democracy what kinds of rights do you grant to ordinary citizens? How do you de-expertise a democracy?” Underpinning this confrontation with secularism is a defence of democratic pluralism and democratic processes. As Nandy affirms, “the democratic rights of citizens or democratic processes...

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75 In a different context, Kristeva also takes up this question, of an ethics that may be possible in this moment of encountering the other, in her reading of cosmopolitanism. See Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
77 Nandy states that, “people always will bring [their ideas and values] into the fray of democratic politics anyway. Once you give the vote to people, you are never sure on what criteria they are voting with, they can and do bring their private into the public. And all this talk about keeping religion and culture to private life, you know that is the basic assumption of secularism, and bringing only political choices into the public sphere, it is absolutely bogus.” See Christine Deftereos, *Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session IV*, (Unpublished Interviews, New Delhi, India, 2005): 3.
78 The confrontation between processes of subjection and democratic pluralism are considered further in Chapter 6 of the dissertation. In that chapter I situate Nandy’s critique of secularism, along with his critique of these processes of subjection more closely within his efforts to rupture and regenerate our understanding of politics. See Chapter 6, *Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics*.
should not be limited to that kind of thought, that kind of emphasis on abstract virtues to which the Indian elite supposedly have a monopoly right.”

2.6 Celebrating Gandhi as the Bad Subject

In Nandy’s account the political identity worthy of further consideration is the non-modern peripheral best personified by Gandhi. According to Nandy, Gandhi as a political figure did not commit to “the hopeless task of banishing religion while expanding democratic participation in politics but dared seek a politics which would be infused with the right kind of religion and be tolerant.” This unapologetic non-compliance with the secular ideal does, however, cast Gandhi as the threatening and disruptive bad subject. Although a significant political figure in the formation of Independent India, Gandhi’s subjectivity as a bad subject contributes to the ambivalent status he continues to receive today within an Indian political imaginary. For Gandhi, as a figure that rejected and traversed the fantasy of the secular ideal and norm is confronted with an interesting predicament. In not complying with these processes and in reinstating the norm, Gandhi is cast as the bad subject, the less than ideal political subject, and ultimately as a non-subject. Nandy suggests that in response to Gandhi’s defiance, there are a number of defensive attempts to cover over this aspect of Gandhi’s selfhood. This is evident in the work of modernists and revisionists who have sought to re-claim Gandhi’s identity and political significance as a modern figure. In doing so, these modernist and revisionists have also defended and re-claimed their own existence, placed under threat by the bad subject. For Nandy, such revisionist efforts can be explained, at least in part, by the “embarrassingly anti-secular” language of religiosity

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82 This ambivalence is demonstrated in the ways that Gandhi remains both a celebrated and maligned political memory. For Nandy this contradiction and ambivalence in the ways in which Gandhi is remembered and represented is worthy of analysis. Nandy works with this by reclaiming the ambivalence within Gandhi’s subjectivity by acknowledging that there are a number of different representations and imaginings possible. In an article titled, “Gandhi after Gandhi,” Nandy explores this ambivalence by identifying four Gandhis which remain alive today, “each” as he tells us, “with his own eccentricities, conveniences and place in the psyche of the society.” There is the story of the Gandhi of the Indian State; the Gandhi of the Gandhians who follow and practice his philosophies in daily life; there is the Gandhi influencing local voices of dissent in Indian public life today, a Gandhi who “considers local versions of Coca-Cola more dangerous than imported ones;” and finally the Gandhi who is the ideological force behind a number of environmental, nuclear and feminist movements. See Ashis Nandy, “Gandhi After Gandhi – The Fate of Dissent in Out Times,” http://www.thelittlemagazine.com (1) (May 2000): 38-41.
that Gandhi brought into public life.\textsuperscript{64} The other part can be explained by Gandhi’s highly ambivalent presence within Indian political life.\textsuperscript{85} Such efforts to minimise Gandhi’s ambivalence in favour of the certitude of his (re-claimed) modern guise are reinforced through the argument that he shares a number of similarities with Nehru. For example, commentators like Nauriya, in an effort to re-claim Gandhi’s modernity have argued that his use of the term secular can be described as Nehruvian.\textsuperscript{86} In contrast to such readings, Gandhi remains for Nandy a defiant figure worthy of celebration, for both his failure to reinstate the secular norm and his ultimate rejection of the secular ideal.

Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash affirm that a figure like Gandhi, as a non-modern peripheral ethnic, can only be recognised as the non-subject or the bad subject.\textsuperscript{87} As these theorists state, “Gandhi was classified as a ‘bad subject’ – from the very beginning of his struggle until well after his assassination,” and to this extent, “the educated elite misunderstood him almost universally.”\textsuperscript{88} It is only by seeing Gandhi as a figure who endorsed Hinduism and Islam as a culture and not a religion that his position can be freed from its threatening and disruptive anti-modern foundations. The intensity of Gandhi’s threat is evidenced in the extreme efforts to abject him from view. This is the Gandhi cast by Hindu Militants as the bad subject or the non-subject, who in failing to reinforce and reiterate the norm endured three attempted assassinations. Gandhi paid the ultimate sanction in being assassinated by the Hindu militant Nathuram Godse.\textsuperscript{89} For Nandy, it is no coincidence that Godse was firstly a Hindu militant and secondly that he used his political commitment to a Hindu India to defend his criminal actions. During his criminal trial, Godse used his passionate commitment to national unity and

\textsuperscript{65} The ambivalence within Gandhi’s identity is celebrated in Ashis Nandy, “A Billion Gandhis,” \textit{Outlook}, (21 June 2004).
\textsuperscript{68} Despite being misunderstood, the authors argue that Gandhi’s ambiguity locates him as the non-subject and bad subject. “Once in a while someone like M. K. Gandhi demonstrates what it means to have the autonomy, dignity and freedom of the ‘non-subject’ – to be neither the coloniser nor the colonised; neither the oppressor nor the oppressed; neither the hawk nor the dove; neither the terrorist nor the terrorised; neither the empower nor the empowered; neither the conscientiser nor the conscientised. See Ashis Nandy, \textit{Bonfire of the Creeds} (2004): 5.
\textsuperscript{69} A number of theorists, Nandy included, have claimed that for the Hindu nationalist movement Gandhi represented the ultimate threat. They argue that it was no coincidence that, “not only were all three attempts on Gandhi’s life made by Hindu nationalists, all three involved Maharashtrian Brahmans.” See Ashis Nandy, S. Trivedy et al., \textit{Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995): 65.
subjection to the secular ideal as his criminal defence. Gandhi, thus pays the ultimate cost for his defiance of the secular ideal, which Butler affirms, is the consequence of failing to reinstate the norm. She notes that, “the subject is compelled to repeat the norms by which it is produced, but that repetition establishes a domain of risk, for if one fails to reinstate the norm ‘in the right way,’ one becomes subject to further sanction, one feels the prevailing conditions of existence threatened.” For Nandy, this does not detract from Gandhi’s features, for it is his failure to reinstate the norm that is worthy of celebration. Further, what Nandy also celebrates is the presence of the possibility of non-compliance and defiance. There is in this moment a possibility to rupture and regenerate meanings, at what Kristeva notes, are the borderlands of signification. In Nandy’s account Gandhi recognises this possibility, given that his “creativity, after all, presumes a certain marginality and, in the matter of culture, a certain dialectic between the classical and the folk.” The operation of the dialectic ensures that a key dynamic remains in place to safeguard against the stagnation and homogenisation of meanings. For Nandy, whether this mode of dissent generated by the bad subject can be accepted as a form of creative and meaningful critique is connected to whether these processes of subjection can be confronted, worked-through and traversed.

2.7 The Limits of Secularism and the Dynamics of Intolerance

Nandy’s reading of how processes of subjection create political identities and respond to ethnicity furthers his claim that the secular ideal in India is working against its own aims. The pathologies of secularism, including the making of religious identities into political ones, are explored in his analysis of the dynamics of intolerance. In Nandy’s reading, the seeds of social and political discontent cannot be understood as random irrational outbreaks of communal tension, but can be explained through the dynamics already outlined. For instance, in a scenario involving two religious communities, Nandy claims that there would be an overt affinity between modern believers within these communities. Thus, a common dialogue may ensue between a westernised Hindu and westernised Muslim whose common enemy comes in the form

90 For a discussion of the assassination of Gandhi refer to Ashis Nandy, “The Fear of Gandhi: Nathuram Godse and His Successors,” The Times of India (27 April 1994.)
92 He continues, “it has to transcend the classicist – and elite – formulation that classicism is the centre of the culture, to protect the classicism itself from becoming a two-dimensional frozen instance of a culture museumised or shelved.” Ashis Nandy, The Romance of the State (2002): 51.
of the zealot. There is, though, a “less overt affinity between the de-cultured westernised ethnic and the partly de-cultured zealot.”93 At play in this scenario is the “hostility of the westernised ethnic towards the peripherals of his own, as well as other faiths, that the westernised ethnic sees as passive or prospective zealots.”94

There is an accepted hostility between Hindu and Muslim zealots, who voice their respective fanaticisms, ethnocentrism and xenophobia with equal vigour. The hatred of the Hindu and Muslim zealot towards the everyday practitioner of his/her faith “is nearly total.”95 The more confronting part of the analysis comes from Nandy’s challenge to this accepted reading of hostility. He suggests that there is a covert affinity between peripheral Hindus and peripheral Muslims in that, through their identities, intolerance for the other and otherness is expressed. Both the Hindu and Muslim peripheral remain limited in their capacity to recognise a plurality of experience, and in turn to recognise the possibilities for alternative modes of toleration and hospitality. As Nandy points out, recognising this shared psychic space between the peripheral Hindu and Muslim, is radically confronting for modern Indians to accept. Rather, in explanations provided by them, it is the historical, cultural, ideological and religious differences that exist between the two that are emphasised. In such accounts it is the Indian communal self that is the breeding ground for intolerance.96 Nandy’s analysis, thus, also runs contrary to more conventional readings of communal strife in which ethnic and religious intolerance remains a symptom of regressive and backward communities who fail to identify with the secular ideal. The response to this view is that this intolerance can only be managed through the aggressive reiteration of official state secularism that can reinforce and strengthen concepts of secular tolerance.

For Nandy, as already detailed, there are distinct limits to secularism’s ability to safeguard tolerance. It is also no coincidence that the Hindu zealot does not necessarily belong to a regressive and backward community. The Hindu zealot, in his reading, is a modern political player who contributes to the seeds of intolerance under the guise of tolerance, Indianess, national identity and unity. For Nandy, part of the appeal of Hindu nationalism is its success in mobilising people in this way, and its appeal is

93 For a more comprehensive analysis of these dynamics are referenced in Ashis Nandy, The Romance of the State (2002): 48-49.
94 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 49.
95 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 49.
96 See for example the argument put forward by Asghar Ali Engineer, eds., Communal Riots in Post-Independence India, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984).
further explained by its very “strong set of psychological defences within its popularity.” 

This popularity is also not removed from Hindu nationalism’s highly sophisticated modernist creed and political identity. As a political movement, it demonstrates these processes of subjection at work, whilst simultaneously capitalising on these dynamics for political ends. At the heart of these assertions for a pan-Indian nationalism, predicated on tolerance and social and political unity is, however, a fundamental contradiction. As Nandy warns, the tolerance proffered by the Hindu nationalists is highly dubious. He states:

…If you claim that you are tolerant, then you cannot use that tolerance as a marker of your superiority and then try to impose that tolerance in most intolerant ways. You know that is what I was trying to drive at. And then claim that we have to do this because others were intolerant! Some others were intolerant in the name of intolerance and others in the name of tolerance. That is the difference.

In the final part of “An Anti-Secular Manifesto”, Nandy addresses the question of the changing nature of riots in India. He lays two further charges against secularism: firstly, the inability of the secular ideal to safeguard communal amity despite its hegemonic and official claims to toleration; and secondly, that secularism has failed to accept responsibility for its (overt and covert) involvement in acts of political violence, including the proliferation of riots within public life. The ideology of secularism may be able to cope with religious riots, which grow out of faulty passions vis-à-vis the irrational definition of the sacred, but it is unable to cope with riots that grow out of rationally managed violence. So, too, the Indian state can, to some extent, accept the

98 This point is developed in the following chapter where I explore in greater detail the ways in which the rising popularity of Hindu nationalism can be explained through these processes of remaking religious identities into political identities. The internal logic of Hindu nationalism as a political identity, and herein lies its popularity, exploits and perpetuates a growing sense of insecurity surrounding concepts of Indianness, and can be understood as a defensive and reactionary movement. For further information regarding Nandy’s critique of these processes, see for, example Ashis Nandy, The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ashis Nandy, “Hinduism Versus Hindutva: The Inevitability of a Confrontation,” The Times of India, (February 18,1991.) Vinay Lal has also critiqued Hindutva as an attempt to universalise and homogenise Hinduism. See Vinay Lal, The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Christine Deftereos, Conversations on Ashis Nandy: Christine Deftereos with Vinay Lal. (2005): 41.
faulty passions of peoples from the periphery or the ethnic backwaters of India who remain on the borderlands of politics. However, it cannot acknowledge its own complicity in the re-making of modern political identities. It cannot concede its own complicity with modern forms of violence, including those actuated by the Hindu nationalist movement. Nandy’s analysis, therefore, contests existing scholarship that continues to present riots and pogroms as products of insufficient modernisation and secularisation. He states that: “…one is forced to admit that communal riots in India have a modern connection…while religious violence was certainly not unknown in pre-modern or non-modern India, the kind of ‘rational,’ ‘managerial,’ ‘inter-communal violence we often witness nowadays can only be a by-product of secularisation and modernisation.” The major threats to religious tolerance come from a modernising India and not from India’s ethnic peripherals. For Nandy, neither the mechanical re-assertion of the secular ideal, nor the more formalised certifications of the ideology, such as amendments made to the Indian Constitution in the 1970s, has succeeded in safeguarding secular tolerance as the only possible solution to communal strife. According to Nandy, it is no coincidence that since these changes to the Constitution have been made, official secularism has become increasingly ineffectual in addressing these seeds of intolerance.

“An Anti-Secular Manifesto,” where Nandy’s confrontation with secularism is first developed, therefore, details his anti-secular position as a radical questioning of the ways political identities and political culture are formed. In Nandy’s reading, the psychic life of power underpinning Indian secular political culture and the political identities within it, exemplify the psychanalytic focus of his work. This takes place at the intersection between political theory and psychoanalysis where Nandy’s starting point for confronting the ideology of secularism is through a questioning of the

102 These changes made by the Indira Gandhi Government were introduced into the Preamble of the Indian Constitution in 1976 during the Emergency in India when civil rights were suspended. The Government, then functioning as a dictatorship, in passing the forty-second amendment certified the principle of secularism into the Indian Constitution. The term secular instituted equality of all religions and religious tolerance and that the government must not favor or discriminate on the basis of religion. The legal precedent for the inclusion of the term was provided in the judgement of the Supreme Court case, S. R. Bommai versus Union of India that upheld that secularism was a principle integral to the Indian Constitution. For a discussion of the late entry of the term “secularism” into the Indian Constitution refer to John Caroll, Jr., “Secularism in India,” in Arvind Sharma, ed., Hinduism and Secularism After Ayodhya, (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
subjectivity that structures Indian secular political culture, and political identities. I have argued that this psychoanalytic focus is a necessary undertaking in Nandy’s critique, if the cultural and psychological viability of secularism is to be seriously addressed. In this respect, the essay, despite its scathing condemnation of state secularism, cannot be read as simply anti-secular, without qualifying the psychoanalytic focus through which this anti-secularism is established and worked through. This anti-secularism cannot also be dismissed as a return to a pre-modern India without considering the ways in which the modern and non-modern feature within concepts of selfhood and Indianness. Nandy’s confrontation with the psychic life of secularism is part of a more multifaceted task, addressing internal and external dynamics and inclusions and exclusions within individual and collective processes of identification. For, in confronting the normative boundaries defining Indian political culture, secular and non-secular, public and private, modern and non-modern, Nandy demonstrates an intellectual sensitivity for the positioning of boundaries. This confrontation can also be read as an appeal for a broader understanding of politics. It is also an appeal to acknowledge the ways that the secular ideal structures processes of identification and, moreover, works to contain concepts of Indianness.

To this extent ambivalence, contradictions and concepts of pluralism, including democratic pluralism, are all central to Nandy’s conceptualisation of politics. Attempts to abject ambivalences and contradictions from view in favour of a strict political identity are also central to his critique of Hindu nationalism, including its political appeal and popularity. In the following chapter, I continue to explore the ways in which this psychoanalytic focus structures Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism, as an extension of his reading of the pathologies of secularism. Although, as Butler warns, the possibility of strict identity is not entirely possible, Nandy situates Hindu nationalism as a defensive, and ultimately, destructive ideology, motivated by such prospects of homogenisation and standardisation. In his depiction, the aim of Hindu nationalism is in the “making over” of Indianness into highly exclusionary and fixed terms, according to the internal aims of Hindutva ideology, and in service of creating a Hindu India. Therefore, like the mono-cultural and homogenising effects of secularism, Hindu nationalism, as a profoundly modern creed, functions in similar ways. Where the two are intimately connected is that Indian secular political culture provides the political conditions for contemporary manifestations of Hindutva. If Nandy’s directive is to defy
and traverse secularism’s damaging political, intellectual and psychological categories of identification, then the question of re-claiming alternatives – including alternative concepts of selfhood and of tolerance – remains a continuing challenge for Indian democracy. This challenge in fostering the diversity and pluralism of Indian democracy reached crisis point during the 1990s, and in early 2000, with the popularity of Hindu nationalism and the Ramjanmabhumi movement reflected in electoral politics. These strategic and highly political efforts to create a Hindu Nation, instituted through the political voice of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), radically tested the democratic pluralism of the world’s largest democracy.
Chapter 3: 
Ambivalence and Contradiction: 
Containing Concepts of Indianness

In the previous chapter I argued that Nandy’s critique of secularism, and his anti-secular position, is developed through his confrontation with the cultural and psychological viability of secularism in India. For Nandy, if secularism and its viability are to be confronted and worked through, then the way in which the ideology structures processes of identification needs to be explored. This includes the way Indian political culture and political identities are formed in relation to a dominant secular ideal. Nandy’s confrontation with the psychic life of secularism is therefore, part of a more multifaceted task. I suggested that this psychoanalytic approach enables him to analyse the cultural and psychic distortions that the ideology of secularism produces. These distortions or as he prefers, the pathologies of secularism, are evident in the way that political identities are made and made over. There are distinct processes of subjection at play as identities, including religious and ethnic identities are made into political identities in accordance with this ideal. In emphasising these processes, his analysis also highlights aspects of selfhood that have been abjected from view. As he states, “while the personality of those within the fully secular, modern sector is well-represented in the democratic order, those outside of the modern sector have only a part of themselves represented in politics.”¹ What Nandy laments are the homogenising and standardising features of these processes of subjection. Furthermore, he equally laments the way in which the ambivalence that marks subjectivity and concepts of Indianness is foreclosed by these processes of making political identities.

However, Nandy’s analysis of secularism emphasises that ambivalence cannot entirely be cast from view. Ambivalence remains within his account, an essential feature of subjectivity, and an essential feature within concepts of Indianness. In “An Anti-Secular Manifesto” Nandy’s confrontation with the secular ideal affirms this point. For example, even in his depiction of Jawaharlal Nehru, validated within Indian political culture as the ideal secular citizen, Nandy emphasises the ambivalence and contradiction that accompanies all subjectivity, including Nehru’s. This is explored

through what he suggests is Nehru’s latent self, his pre-modern or cultural self that survives as the underside of his modern secular self. This latent self also survives as the underside of Indian political culture. For Nandy, the dynamic interplay between dominant and latent parts of self is essential to confronting and working through processes of homogenisation and standardisation. Recognising the ambivalence that is a feature of all subjectivity, or rather a condition of subjectivity is also consistent with Butler’s argument about the psychic life of power. For as Butler elaborates in her account of subjection, “the power imposed on one is the power that animates one’s emergence, and there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence. Indeed, there appears to be no ‘one’ without ambivalence, which is to say that the fictive redoubling necessary to become a self rules out the possibility of strict identity.” In Nandy’s critique the pathologies of secularism reveal themselves as attempts to impose a “strict identity;” as political identities are made in ways that foreclose ambivalence.

These attempts to foreclose ambivalence, as an effect of the distortions of the dominant secular ideal are also central to Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism. During the 1990s ambivalence was further threatened by a changing Indian political landscape. This threat came in the rising popularity of Hindu nationalism and Hindutva ideology with its increasingly militant, and at times violent political demands to make over India as Hindu. The popularity of Hindutva ideology, reached its peak in 1999 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the leading party in the National Democratic Alliance Coalition Government, holding power until May 2004. For Nandy, the greatest threat that Hindu nationalism and the Hindu Right posed, and which continues today, is that the ideology proffers a very specific and exclusionary account of Indianness. This account of Indianness functions as a “strict identity” as ambivalence, contradiction and pluralism are cast from view. The internal logic of Hindutva ideology, in effect works to reconstitute the positioning of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, thus limiting claims to Indianness. This reconstituted concept of Indianness is then used to justify the rightful and entitled claims over nation, and is appropriated to appease and further exacerbate anxieties regarding national integration. The Hindu nationalist claim to make

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2 Nandy explores this in terms of the ways that Nehru’s pre-modern or cultural self reveals itself in practices, such as his reliance upon tantrics that are suggestive of ambivalence. For a discussion of this refer to Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 45.

over and “purify” Indianness and India as Hindu thus necessitates the abjection of ambivalence and plural accounts of selfhood in service of a “strict identity.”

The full extent of Hindutva’s exclusionary ideas and practices are demonstrated in the outbreaks of violence that have surfaced, notably in the 1990s. This violence includes the political events that led to the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh 1992, an event in which thousands of people, mainly Muslims lost their lives. This was followed by the aftermath of violence and revenge attacks that spread across Northern India between Hindu and Muslim communities. Events like the Bombay Riots in December 1992 and January 1993 and the Gujarat riots in 2002, in which 2,000 people died and 200,000 were displaced from their homes and communities, dominated the political landscape. For Nandy these events and the violence carried out in the name of Hindutva cannot be explained by what is perceived to be the communal politics threatening India’s secularity. Nandy radically challenges this account and argues that these are thoroughly modern acts of violence connected to a secular political culture. Further, these acts of violence carried out in the 1990s cannot be dismissed as aberrations, but rather, are part of larger defensive forces operating in Indian politics around concepts of Indianness, national identity, national integration and democracy. These are effects of more complex long-term processes, dating back to the Emergency in India and the policies of the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi Governments in the 1980s. For Nandy the political seeds giving rise to these events had

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7 Elsewhere Nandy has argued that, “psychologically Indira Gandhi represents important aspects of contemporary Indian consciousness.” He continues that her “grotesqueness and successes are in some ways the failures and successes of India’s civic consciousness too.” See “Indira Gandhi and the Culture of
been planted earlier and need to be understood as continuing effects of the distortions of
a dominant secular ideology, altering cultural, social and political priorities within
Indian political culture.\textsuperscript{4} India’s secular slogan of “Unity in Diversity” has, and more
importantly, continues to be radically tested by these processes. The anti-Sikh riots in
Delhi in November 1984, the anti-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad in 1985 during the anti-
reservation stir and the anti-Hindu riots in Bangalore in 1986, also need to also be
understood as part of these ongoing disputes over Indianness. For Nandy, it is the
pathologies of secularism that are being expressed in the xenophobia and fanaticism
underpinning the politics of contemporary violence in India today. What is problematic,
and needs to be confronted and worked through is that, “…the modern state itself
invites the formation of such adversarial nationalities by leaving that as the only
effective way of making collective demands on the state and playing the game of
numbers in competitive politics.”\textsuperscript{9} As Nandy’s critique of secularism highlights these
issues necessitate an approach that accounts for the way in which Indian political
culture and political identities are formed. Moreover, it calls for a psychoanalytic
approach that can account for the psychic life of power and processes of subjection
operating in adversarial nationalities.

In Nandy’s writings the Hindu zealot is a product of the processes of subjection
operating in Indian secular political culture. As detailed in his critique of secularism the
Hindu zealot is “reacting to and yet internalising the humiliation inflicted on all faiths
by a triumphant anti-faith called western modernity, [and] has accepted the western
enlightenments attitude to all faiths including his own.”\textsuperscript{10} This rejection is evident in
that most of the reformers in the Hindu nationalist movement were either agnostic or
non-believers; some of them not even practising Hindus.\textsuperscript{11} In Nandy’s analysis being a
believer in public and non-believer in private is a defining characteristic of the political
identity of the Hindu zealot. This is also the case with D.V. Savarkar, the founding

\textsuperscript{4} This altering of cultural, social and political priorities in Indian political culture can also be understood as part of processes that were taking place on a global level, since the 1980s with the rise of neo-liberalism and a general ideological shift to the cultural politics of the Right in western liberal democracies. For example this connection is made by Radhika Desai, “Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva,” \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, (20 March 1999): 695-712.


\textsuperscript{10} Refer to the argument outlined in the previous chapter. See Chapter 2 An Anti-Secular Manifesto? The Cultural and Psychological Viability of Secularism.
father of Hindutva. Nandy suggests that Savarkar’s political identity illustrates the complicity between secularism, modernity and Hindu nationalism. Secularism may provide the conditions for the Hindu zealot’s political voice, but both secularism and Hindutva share the objective of making over India into a homogenised mono-cultural society. Confronting and working through the way in which religious and ethnic identities are made into political identities, is central to understanding these processes.

In this chapter I explore Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism and its relationship to the pathologies of secularism. As he contends at the core of the Hindu nationalism is “a secular ideology of the state and a modern rationality.” I detail the way in which these processes of making over Hinduism into a political identity take place. Consistent with Nandy’s approach understanding the positioning of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operating within Hindutva, in who can make claims to Indianness and claims over nation, are vital. The final part of the chapter address the way the “Ayodhya issue” and the Ramjanmabhumi movement affirms Nandy’s argument that Hindutva ideology is a thoroughly modern and defensive movement. It is an end product of efforts to make over or “convert Hindu’s into a ‘proper’ modern nation and a conventional ethnic majority,” articulated through a defensive set of beliefs and political identifications. These defenses for Nandy, expressed in the pathologies of xenophobia and fanaticism, attempt to cover over the insecurity and fear that accompanies the ambivalence of concepts of Indianness and of selfhood. As he suggests these are defences against ambivalence, contradictions and pluralism, in favour of the certitudes of a “strict identity.” They are thus, also defences against latent and disavowed concepts of Indianness grounded in a fear of self (or latent parts of self) and a fear of difference and

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13 Ashis Nandy et al. Ibid., vii.

14 Nandy and the other authors state that the title of their text Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self “represents the awareness that the chain of events we describe is the end-product of a century of effort to convert the Hindus into a ‘proper’ modern nation and a conventional ethnic majority and it has as its underside the story, which we have told here, of corresponding efforts to turn the other faiths of the subcontinent into proper ethnic minorities and well-behaved nationalities.” Ashis Nandy et al. Creating a Nationality, (1995): vi.
otherness.\textsuperscript{15} Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism thus warns us against the way in which the ambivalence that marks subjectivity, and more plural accounts of Indianness is foreclosed by these processes. “In this respect at least,” he argues, “there \textit{is} no difference whatsoever between Hindu nationalism and statist secularism.”\textsuperscript{16} In addition to advancing the need to reclaim ambivalence, his analysis also alerts us to the fact that these processes of “making Indian Hindu” have much to reveal about the health of Indian democracy.\textsuperscript{17}

3.1 Making Political Identities: Religion as Ideology

There is an extensive body of literature critiquing Hindu nationalism and the threat that it poses to Indian secularism.\textsuperscript{18} This includes critiquing the political conditions that have given rise to these processes of “making India Hindu.” Further, to what extent have these processes compromised India’s secular political identity? Partha Chatterjee has questioned whether Indian secularism can even meet the challenge of Hindu nationalism and these processes of making over Indian identity. He notes the complicity between Indian secularism and the Hindu Right, and to this extent questions whether the ideology of secularism can challenge the political forces of Hindutva. As Chatterjee emphasises the Hindu nationalist movement is located “within the domain of the modernising state and \textit{uses} all the ideological resources of that state.”\textsuperscript{19} To suggest


\textsuperscript{16} Ashis Nandy et al. \textit{Ibid.}, 60.


that state secularism can respond to processes that have provided the political conditions for Hindu nationalist views to flourish is dubious. John Zavos suggests that the focus of debate should be on the internal logic of Hindutva, in order to understand the threat that it poses to secularism. Zavos claims there is a need to identify the shapes of Hindu nationalism, the shadows it casts on Indian politics, in order to understand the full extent of this threat. The metaphor of shapes is appropriate, he argues, because “so many Hindu nationalist ideas are concerned with the issue of ‘shaping’…in particular shaping Hindu society into a form that reflects the perceived glory of the Hindu ‘race.’” While Zavos rightly comments upon the altering of cultural, social and political priorities, Nandy’s account extends on this further. It is not only shapes and the process of shaping in Hindu Nationalism that needs to be confronted, but aspects of self and of Indianness that are being contained and foreclosed through these processes. For Nandy this necessitates a reading of the way in which these processes of “creating a nationality” are intimately connected to a “fear of self,” and a fear and disavowal of a particular kind of Hinduism. Hindu nationalism and the political identity of the Hindu zealot must be understood as part of more complex historical, cultural and psychic processes to make over and reconstitute Hinduism. The ambivalence and pluralism that mark Hinduism, Indian traditions, and culture for Nandy are being hijacked and reconstituted within fixed identity categories. These processes of subjection are complete for Nandy because “Indianness is no longer defined in terms of what Indians are and the ways they live; it is derived from ideal-typical definitions.” The deferral to these ideal-type definitions is significant because this provides the psychic and cultural impetus for these processes of making over Indianness. “Hence,” he argues, “the long and abiding connection between Hindu nationalism and Hindu social reform movements of all hues.” For Nandy, the ideal-type definitions used to make over Hinduism are intimately connected to the secular ideal operating within Indian political culture and within political identities. To this extent, affirming the position that the ideology of secularism is capable of countering the political challenge presented by Hindu nationalism, is itself an effect of the distortions of this dominant ideology.

21 This exploration of fear is central to the argument established in Ashis Nandy et al. Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self, (1995).
22 Ashis Nandy et al., Ibid., 78.
23 As the authors state, “such ideal-typical definitions then become the staple of the formations which see the majority itself as flawed in character and as a fit subject for large-scale social engineering.” Ashis Nandy et al., Ibid., 78.
Nandy’s essay “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance,” written in 1990 offers an analysis of why these processes have found political expression in violence. The essay also offers a more detailed account of the complicity between a modern Indian nation state, modern intellectuals and the modernising middle classes of South Asia with these forms of violence. Nandy argues that these constituencies, namely modern intellectuals and the modernising middle classes, are complicit with these processes of subjection operating in Indian political culture. It is no coincidence that these constituencies are also the most vocal in their support for the secular ideal and their defence of the ideal is almost complete. For they maintain that the violence carried out in the name of Hindutva needs to be addressed through the re-assertion of the secular ideal, to counter the current pseudo-secularism that marks contemporary Indian politics. Nandy’s critique radically challenges these views given that both secularism and Hindutva are examples of “faulty ideologies and unrestrained instrumental rationality,” facilitating these forms of violence. The essay can be read as a confrontation with the effects of the distortions of the dominant secular ideology, which has given rise to the fanaticism and xenophobia of the Hindu nationalists. Further, it is an attempt to recover concepts of religious tolerance that for Nandy, survives, albeit latently and resists these processes of reconstituting religion into a political identity.

Nandy distinguishes between two different accounts of religion in order to explore the way these processes of subjection take effect. He suggests that the concept of religion has been split into two distinct interpretations with very different internal configuring principles: “religion as faith” and “religion as ideology.”

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27 Nandy references the works of philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse in arguing that the most extreme forms of violence in our times come not from faulty passions or human irrationality but from faulty ideologies and unrestrained instrumental rationality. See Veena Das, ed. Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia (1990): 85.

that both concepts are configured within accounts of self very differently. Religion as faith is characterised as a way of living, or a modality of being derived from within the pluralism and diversity of the cultural and religious practices of South Asian traditions. This account of “religion as faith” recognises that the boundaries that define Hinduism and the Hindu self are fluid and open, evidenced in the way that Hindus can follow and also identify as followers of other and many faiths. Hinduism characterised by its non-monotheistic basis does not demand for Nandy an allegiance to a singular identification or to a singular fixed identity.

In contrast to this, religion as ideology uses religion instrumentally as an ideological tool for political gain. This reconstituted account of religion functions politically as a sub-national, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, political or socio-economic interests. The differences between these are significant for understanding the argument Nandy makes about the internal logic of Hindu nationalism. As Nandy and the other authors of Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of Self argue, “in fact, Hindu Nationalism has to specifically reject a cultural-moral definition of Hinduism, the political possibilities of which were to be later developed by M.K.Gandhi.” The authors emphasise that a cultural and moral definition of Hinduism must be rejected in favour of this reconstituted, revised and made over Hinduism. This Hinduism, now made over as a political identity, must distinguish and differentiate itself from concepts of “religion as faith” and from the world-view of the non-modern peripheral Indian. It distinguishes itself on the basis that it is a political identity, afforded a political status and political voice within Indian political culture. It must therefore, distinguish itself as opposite from Gandhi’s “bad subject,” who fails to reinstate the secular norm and is abjected from political view. The authors contend that it is Gandhi’s commitment to this cultural-moral Hinduism as the basis of politics that is threatening and disruptive to Indian secular culture. They continue that what is even more threatening to these boundaries of differentiation, is that Gandhi’s account of “religion as faith” functions as a political critique of these processes. For “his Hinduism brings to politics a cultural-moral critique of Hindutva from the point of view of

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Hinduism as the living faith of a majority of Indians."\(^{32}\) Nandy develops this point in a number of places in his writings, and asserts that Gandhi’s critique of Hindutva must be understood as a feature of his scathing critique of western modernity.\(^{33}\)

“Religion as ideology” is a product of modern India and of a secular political culture. Nandy affirms that Hindu nationalism “has always been an illegitimate child of modern India, not of Hindu traditions.”\(^{34}\) Hindu nationalism as a modern and contemporary creed shifts political dynamics, as traditions and religion are appropriated instrumentally in service of justifying reconstituted political claims over nation. The dangers are not necessarily in the fact that political claims over nation are being made. What is problematic for Nandy is how these claims are made and the form that these claims take as pathology, in order to make political demands on the state. When plural Indian traditions and open religions like Hinduism are given a mono-cultural content, then this gives rise to a highly specific and politicised account of Indianness. Who then can make claims over Indianness and nation becomes over-determined by the internal logic of the ideology and instituted in a series of specific exclusionary practices. This account of Indianness is organised around a series of ideal types and not through the embedded experiences of how people live and express their subjectivity. For Nandy, this deviation from an alternative account of “religion as faith” forecloses openness, pluralism and ambivalence in favour of a strict identity. It equally truncates an engagement with different expressions of religion in contemporary India. The dominant form that religion now takes and in which it finds its political voice is in a de-sacralized account of religion.\(^{35}\) As Nandy affirms, politics “has become a site of contention

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\(^{32}\) The authors continue that what is problematic is when nationalism is “given a monocultural content and the definition of Indianess ceases to be a statistical artefact to become a reality on the ground, the minority cultures become easy and legitimate targets of criticism, social engineering and, as a leader of the erstwhile Jan Sangh once put it “indianisation.” When such targeting takes place, Indianness is no longer defined in terms of what Indians are and the ways in which they live; it is derived from ideal-typical definitions.”\(^{32}\) Ashis Nandy et al. *Creating a Nationality* (1995): 78.


\(^{35}\) The philosopher Raimundo Panikkar has commented upon this de-sacralised appropriation of religion operating in politics. Panikkar argues against these instrumental accounts of religion. As he says, “although the etymology of the word religion is closer to the meaning of dharma than it sounds to modern westernised ears, the prevalent political use of the word in the West today (spreading also over the planet) has restricted the meaning of religion to a very narrow sense, which has led many countries of the world to defend the privatisation of religion as something appertaining to the individual in his private conscience.” Raimundo Panikkar (Presidential Address, Second International Conference on Religions
between the modern that attacks or bypasses traditions and the modern that employs traditions instrumentally.” Within this political culture traditions become a resource for these processes of subjection, as the modern Hindu zealot draws upon traditions, culture, myths and religious symbols to articulate its demands in the vernacular of the state.

In “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance” Nandy re-affirms his argument that the pathologies of secularism work to foreclose fluid accounts of the self and of Indianness. Moreover, these pathologies foreclose the possibility of there being ambivalent expressions of subjectivity, even as latent features of the underside of culture. The recovery that is needed for Nandy is in the reclaiming of religious tolerance and the recovery of ambivalence inherent within a latent account of Hinduism. As detailed in “An Anti-Secular Manifesto” these fluid accounts of self, of Indianness, of Hinduism and of tolerance are already present in the non-modern peripheral subject. There is an emphasis placed by Nandy on the way that “religion as faith” denotes a different account of self and through which a different account of tolerance is advanced. For it demonstrates the way in which the non-modern, and to this extent apolitical practices of toleration and hospitality can resist processes of subjection. There is a resistance within these everyday expressions of Hinduism and Islam that reinforces ambivalence in the way in which the boundaries within religious identity are cast. Nandy concedes though that this resistance has to contend with another kind of resistance; the denial of the importance of one’s own categories of identification in relation to these political processes.37

In contrast to this, “religion as ideology” or Hindu nationalism advances an account of self, through the disavowal and abjection of parts of one’s self, and in service of a “fixed identity.” What must therefore, be disavowed and abjected from view are parts of self, a pre-modern or cultural self, that remains peripheral, if not outside of politics. What is also abjected from view are ambivalence, contradictions and concepts of pluralism, all central to the non-modern peripheral account of Indianness. These

37 Nandy describes this resistance or denial of ambivalence that the non-modern peripheral represents, as a “principled forgetfulness.” He continues, “That resistance [the non-modern peripheral’s resistance] is not noticed because another kind of ‘principles forgetfulness comes into play when modern, secular scholars study religious or ethnic violence.” Ashis Nandy et al., Creating a Nationality, (1995): viii.
more fluid accounts of selfhood are thus, disavowed through processes of subjection in service of a well bounded self or fixed identity. As Shrinivas Tilak argues “the Hindu tradition, religion, culture and literature today are victims of the modern ego.”

Nandy’s analysis this is an important association to establish and one that needs to be confronted, if secularism and Hindu nationalism are to be seriously questioned. For Nandy, the psychoanalytic argument is useful because it draws attention to the complexities of these processes of identification. Nandy draws on Tariq Banuri’s comparison of the dominant position of the ego in Freudian psychology with the dominant position of the nation-state in contemporary ideas of political development. As Nandy suggests, “to complete [Banuri’s] evocative metaphor, one must view secularism as a crucial defence of the ego.” If secularism can be understood as a defence of the ego, then Hinduism expressed in its pathological form as a reconstituted political identity, becomes a victim of these processes of identification.

However, the reconstituted Hindu self, (“religion as ideology”) projects that abjection of disavowed parts of self, onto India’s “alien others.” and this is where the dangers of Hindutva are to be found. Noelle McAffee has argued that these political conditions lead to “national(istic) abjection,” and that this “breeds the worst kind of violence and inhumanity.” For Nandy, the dangers of this abjection (at the level of self and society) are in the way that these they manifest and find recourse in psychic life, as isolation, denial, and self-hatred. These deeply internalised defences in service of protecting the ego (and the ego ideal of western man) characterise the psychic life of the Hindu zealot and the psychic life of Hindutva. Articulated in the exclusionary beliefs of its followers, these defences remain in Nandy’s analysis unchallenged by an Indian secular political culture.

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41 McAffee argues that expressions of “national(istic) abjection breeds the worst kind of violence and inhumanity. Racism, fascism and genocide are the extreme dangers, but even the lesser abjections, such as attempts to legislate a national language are no more humane.” See Noelle McAffee, Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2000): 124.
3.2 Who claims Indianness? The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

In contemporary Indian politics the remaking of religious and ethnic identities into political identities have complicated the claims made over Indianness. In Nandy’s analysis, concepts of Indianness have been co-opted by the strong set of defences that are the features of a remade Hinduism. The positioning of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and who can then claim Indianness, plays out in specific terms. The obvious exclusions of the ideology are in the way minority cultures such as Muslims become the legitimate targets for hostility, threat and fear within reconstituted concepts of Indianness. On what grounds though do these claims of Indianness take form? How do these processes of “making India Hindu,” these processes of subjection, take place to affirm Hindu India and excludes its others?

There are a number of texts that have been central to the internal logic of Hindutva. These include V.D Savarkar’s text written in 1923 Who is a Hindu? attributed as the foundational text of Hindutva ideology and Savarkar its ideological father. Other important texts include the writings of Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, especially Bunch of Thoughts published in 1966 and We, or Our Nation Defined published in 1944 and to a lesser extent Deendayal Upadhyaya.42 There is debate though in critiques of Hindu Nationalism regarding what role these texts have played in reconstituting Hinduism into a political identity. For example, theorists like Zavos have emphasised that these texts do not form a coherent body of work or advance a coherent ideological position. Zavos reiterates the fractured quality of these ideas, suggesting that it represents a broad field of thought.43 In Nandy’s account, while these texts may constitute a fractured set of ideas, the political processes of remaking the Indian self as exclusively Hindu are anything but fractured. For Nandy, D.V. Savarkar epitomises the subjectivity of the zealot and his questioning of “who is a Hindu?” is asked in the spirit

42 Nandy has argued that Golwalkar and Upadhyaya were important figures in the Hindu nationalist movement in the ways in which they broadened the ideological platform of Hindutva through their involvement in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). See “Chapter VI. Family Business,” in Ashis Nandy, et.al., Creating a Nationality (1995): 81-99. For a more lengthy discussion of these figures and their involvement in the RSS see Tapan Basu, et.al., Khaki Shorts Saffron Flags, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).
43 For instance, Zavos notes that although Savarkar is bestowed with the titled of the ideological father of Hindu nationalism and his text the “classic” text of Hindu nationalism, he was not a member of the RSS and, therefore, cannot in that organisation’s version of history be portrayed as too central in the development of Hindu nationalism. See John Zavos, “The Shapes of Hindu Nationalism” in Katherine Adeney and Lawrence Saez, eds., Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism, (Oxford: Routledge, 2005): 36.
of the non-believer in private, and as a believer in public. While Savarkar begins with a seemingly broad construction of Hindu nationality, described by Zavos as “catholic,” embracing a broad range of religious and cultural systems, this approach to Hinduism and Hindu culture is ultimately made over. Savarkar re-constitutes this depiction by questioning, and, in Nandy’s depiction by “obsessively” working on the boundaries of this range. Thus Savarkar advances a series of tropes that position the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion defining Indianness and claims over nation in fixed terms. For example, this is demonstrated in Savarkar’s formula of pitribhum-punyabhum (fatherland-holy land). According to this trope whoever can identify India as both their fatherland and holy land may then be considered a Hindu. For Nandy, the most crucial political exclusion and abjection that take’s place is through Savarkar’s trope of the rashtra-jati-sanskriti (nation-race-culture) that is seen as components of Hinduness. However, identification with the Hindu race and nation can only take place through punyabhum, for those who also identify India as a holy land. For Nandy, this is where religion operates instrumentally, now reconstituted as ideology, as concepts of nation, race and culture are defined by these overriding rightful claims to holy land. Based on Savarkar’s account, those excluded and abjected from making claims to India and in turn, Indianness are Muslims and Christians in that they locate their holy land and their cultural identity outside of India.

Despite writing about these processes in 1923, Savarkar’s questioning of Who is a Hindu? proves for Nandy to be enduring and resilient in its exclusions and abjections. The intensity of these boundaries of exclusion operating in the Hindu political identity is demonstrated in the key tenant of the ideology: that is, resisting religious conversion. Consistent with the exclusions actuated through pitribhum-punyabhum, conversion to Islam or Christianity therefore, amounts to a process of de-nationalisation. For Nandy this exemplifies Savakar’s political identity as a zealot and his appropriation of identity politics for political ends. Savarkar’s contributions can thus be measured alongside his

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44 See D. V. Savarkar, Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2003 [1923]).
political project of creating a distinct nationality. As a number of commentators point out, Savarkar admitted he was willing the nation into being with his mantra of “we Hindus will to be a Nation, and therefore, we are a Nation.”

David Smith also comments on these processes of making over Hinduism by noting that Savarkar himself referred “to Hinduism as a creature from the deep. From what can be seen as the primordial depth of the imagination.”

Who can claim Indianess, is also established through history and geography. For Savarkar the history unfolds, at least in broad terms in the following way. Hinduness and, in turn, Indianess is rooted in the Aryan civilisation and the establishment of the Vedic tradition. According to his account there was a gradual expansion of Aryan influence, leading eventually to the religious, cultural, and political unification of the subcontinent under Lord Ram. This was followed by periods of Hindu and Buddhist ascendancy, which in turn, were superseded by the Muslim incursion and the beginning of a long period of struggle to maintain Hindu identity in the face of foreign invasions. Despite the Vedic civilisation of the Aryans being used as a reference point by a number of groups, it is claimed that Muslim rule created a decisive break in Indian history. As Nandy argues current grievances against Muslim minorities can thus be located and referenced back to these past, primordial grievances. These ideas have served to emphasise the embeddedness of the Hindu nationalist identity, in part because of its definable and uninterrupted historical lineage.

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71 It is important to note that there are variations in the way that Vedic traditions have been interpreted. For instance, Nandy and the other authors of Creating a Nationality explore the ways in which these variations have been taken up in different ways in the umbrella groups comprising the contemporary Hindu Nationalist movement. Their analysis includes a comparative discussion of these traditions within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the youth wing of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal. As they outline, “deviating from RSS orthodoxy, which permits only Mother India or Bharat Mata as a theistic presence, the VHP leadership, mostly Hindi-speaking north Indians, admit the greater power of theistic Hinduism as compared to that of the Neo-Vedantic Arya Samaj. This thesis though is given a monotheistic slant, as an antidote to Hinduism’s ‘embarrassingly’ non-revelatory, pagan character.” See Ashis Nandy, et.al., Creating a Nationality, (1995): 87. For an account of the RSS refer to Walter K. Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism, (New Delhi: Vistara, 1987).
Bharat nation as divine because of its sacred geography, which too has a historical lineage established through sacred Hindu texts, like the Ramayana. These processes have an important role to play in positioning of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, by invoking what Sankaran Krishna has described as “cartographic anxieties.”

These “cartographic anxieties,” particularly the fear of a loss of national identity, and national integration rely upon the appropriation of Hinduism, religious texts, and symbols to perpetuate exclusive and entitled rights over Indianness. This is evidenced for instance, in the way that the Hindu Gods Ram and Sita the heroes of the myths of the Ramayana, become archetypal Indians. For Hindu nationalists Ram and Sita are national heroes and not only religious figures. For Nandy this nationalist and exclusive claim must be confronted and challenged. He asks: “why does the VHP [Vishwa Hindu Parishad], like a greedy street peddler, sell Ram as a secular national hero, and not as a religious figure?” This archetype of Ram as a national hero is not only privileged but also then celebrated for political ends. For instance, as Chakravarti has argued in her critique of the “saffronization of India” the Rajiv Gandhi Government directly participated in celebrating and disseminating the myth of the Ramayana. Chakravarti explores the Gandhi Government’s decision during the 1980s to televise the serialisation of this myth, which went on to become one of the most popular TV serials in Indian history. The myth of Ramayana, in which Ram is represented as a martial hero

54 Runa Das offers a brief summary of the Ramayana the story of Sita’s abduction and its importance for Hindu nationalism. Das states that, “In the Indian epic Ramayana, the story of Sita’s abduction goes as follows: Sita (the princess-queen of Ayodhya and wife of Lord Ram) while in exile with her husband, was abducted by the demon king Ravana. Following this abduction, a war ensued between Ram and Ravana, as a result of which Sita was rescued. What becomes glorified in this legend by the Hindu nationalists, is the focus on Sita’s chastity, to prove which (since imprisoned by another male) she had to go through fire (fire represents the Hindu god of purity.) See Runa Das, “Nation, Gender and Representations of (In)securities in Indian Politics: Secular Modernity and Hindutva Ideology,” European Journal of Women’s Studies, 15(3) (2008): 219.
defending the honour of Hinduism armed with his mighty bow, defending the honour of his wife Sita, becomes one of the most popular images. This image is noteworthy not only because of the re-claiming of a masculine potency central to the affirmation and assertion of a masculine Hindu self, but because it is an image that played a central role in the dispute over the birthplace of Lord Rama at Ayodhya in the early 1990s. The act of defending Sita functions as a metaphor for the defence of the honour of Bharat Mata, Mother India. As Chakravarti points out the dissemination of such myths through the media have been central to the growing political popularity of Hindu nationalist views during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, these myths have been fundamental to propagating the psychic life of Hindutva and in instituting its political demands within contemporary India.

The appropriation of Ram and Sita as identifiable national heroes thus serves to re-enforce the exclusions over who has claims to Indianness and nation. This is exemplified most recently in the way in which the plans to (re)build a Hindu temple in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Mosque at the proclaimed birthplace of Ram in Ayodhya, are defended as a national project. Therefore, any resistances to the (re)building of the temple, especially from Muslims are deemed anti-national. The Muslim devotee protecting Muslim claims to the sacred site of the Babri Mosque is reconstituted in threatening terms and made over as the anti-national and anti-Indian subject. This recent example of rebuilding in Ayodhya demonstrates the way in which Hindutva has altered cultural, social and political priorities within Indian political culture. These exclusions were formalised even further when the BJP formed government and the Sangh took control of the national agencies in 1999-2004, including

57 Although this is not explored at length in the discussion here, the role of gender in Hindutva ideology and in the development of Hindu nationalist movement is an important feature. For example Nandy has argued that this reconstituted concept of Hinduism proffered by the Hindu nationalists is part of an attempt to masculinise the self-definition of Hindus. It is also an attempt to counter the colonialist view of Hinduism and the Hindu man as effeminate. On this issue refer to Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Ashis Nandy et al. *Creating a Nationality* (1995): 60-62. Runa Das also offers an interesting discussion of the relationship between gender and concepts of nation. Das explores how “the postcolonial India’s states project of nation-building – reflective of a Western secular-modernity identity (under the Congress Party) and a Hindutva-dominated identity (under the BJP)- incorporates gender with continuities and discontinuities to articulate divergent forms of nationalist communalist identities, ‘cartographic anxieties’ and nuclear (in)securities.” See Runa Das, “Nation, Gender and Representations of (In)securities in Indian Politics: Secular Modernity and Hindutva Ideology,” (2008): 203-221.

the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Ministry of Education. These processes of making India Hindu were instituted in pedagogical practices and in the public school curriculum.\(^{59}\) The education reforms were primarily organised around accounts of history that characterised Hinduism as indigenously Indian, and Islam and Christianity as alien invaders to India. Learning about periods of Islamic rule in Indian history, such as the Mughal Empire are constructed as Muslim attempts to conquer and exploit an indigenously authentic Hindu India. These pedagogical practices are significant in consolidating and perpetuating Hindutva’s defensive beliefs within individual and collective life. The defence reaches its logical conclusion in the argument that Hindu violence against Muslims, like the violence witnessed at Ayodhya, is a natural manifestation of a historically constituted Hindu rage.

In Nandy’s analysis these defences demonstrate the political victory of the Hindu zealot, of “religion as ideology” over the everyday follower of Hinduism, of “religion as faith.” He notes that, “this re-engineered, culturally bipedal Hindu is to be backed by an ideology that is a pasteurised Brahmanic version of the dominant public ideology of the modern West.”\(^{60}\) What is discernable about the ideology are the positioning of distinct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. “The ideology works on the basis of a number of obvious polarities: genuine secularism as opposed to pseudo-secularism, genuine history as opposed to false history, true nationalism as opposed to false or effete patriotism.”\(^{61}\) It is, however, through the politicisation of these polarities, the re-assertion of these boundaries as “fixed” and without ambivalence, which enables the defensive logic of the ideology to reproduce itself as a feature of contemporary Indian political culture.

3.3 Making India Hindu: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of Self\(^{62}\)

The late Indian philosopher Ramachandra Gandhi has suggested that Ayodhya functions as a site “where the honour of India’s spiritual traditions [is] being severely


\(^{60}\) Ashis Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality* (1995): 49.


\(^{62}\) These phrases capture important features of Nandy’s argument and are taken from two different books exploring these complexities. See David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu*, (2005) and Ashis Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*, (1995).
tested."63 The Ayodhya dispute is a reminder of other disavowed selves and other accounts of Hinduism that are deemed to have no place in contemporary politics. In Nandy’s analysis, Ayodhya is thus a testing ground for these reconstituted dominant political selves and their political demands. Moreover, these political demands are articulated in the vernacular of the modern secular state, and appropriated for political end. Nandy argues that, “the destruction of the Babri Mosque, began the day Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi unlocked the gates of the temple within the mosque to gain an electoral advantage.”64 It did not begin on the 6 December 1992, when the supporters of the VHP, the Shiv Sena Party together with the then opposition party, the BJP led the destruction of the mosque. Nandy states that “it is no accident that, despite the claim of some Hindu nationalists that more than 350,000 Hindus had already died fighting for the liberation of the birthplace of Rama, Ramjanmabhumi, during the previous 400 years, the residents of Ayodhya themselves lived in reasonable amity till the late 1980s.”65 The role of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP is significant here, because for Nandy the case for the destruction of the Babri mosque was not taken up until after the mid 1980s. As he emphasises, “the Babri mosque was turned into a political issue only after India’s urban middle class attained a certain size and India’s modernization reached a certain stage.”66

The destruction of the mosque is representative of Hindutva’s political victory, because “religion as ideology” has succeeded in its aims. Furthermore, “the arguments justifying the destruction of the mosque were premised on the concept of secularism and toleration based on religious identity.”67 Crossman and Kapur suggest that, in this instance, the Muslims were accused of demonstrating their intolerance by eradicating the *janambhoomi* (birth place) of Hindu belief and religious practice.68 Nandy adds to this by noting that such attitudes justified further the actions of the Hindus in defending

against and hence, avenging these contested claims. Tensions escalated again in February 2002 when more than 50 people died when a train carrying Hindu activists returning to Gujarat from Ayodhya was set alight, allegedly by a group of Muslims. This again sparked off unprecedented communal terror in the State of Gujarat and across Northern India reaching as far as Bombay, which led to the bloody death of many, mainly Muslims. The bloodshed was viewed as the most serious threat to India’s secular identity since 1947. Nandy reinforces the point that these acts of violence must be understood as political processes that were equally motivated by electoral politics. He states that, “in Gujarat, the riots took place not in Saurashtra and South Gujarat where the BJP was well placed electorally, but in central and north Gujarat where the party was unsure of its performance.” The issue for Nandy is a political one, located within an Indian secular culture and not outside of it; and not a question of communal politics as supporters of secularism are want to believe. The authors of Making Indian Hindu: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India (2005) also note that, “when local conflicts of any kind become communal, they [the middle classes] advertise the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] idea that India is still wracked by Hindu failure to purify Bharat as a Hindu homeland. Metaphorically, communal conflict anywhere affirms that Hindu India lives at odds with its alien others.”

Writing on the 18th February 1991 in The Times of India Nandy suggests that the battle between Hinduism (“religion as faith”) and Hindutva (“religion as ideology”) is inevitable. “Hinduism versus Hindutva: The Inevitability of a Confrontation” critiques the direct assault that Hindutva makes on Hinduism. Nandy adds by noting that this occurs at a pivotal historical moment when “secularist dogmas have broken out in many forms and in many places in the world.” For Nandy, Hindutva as an ethno-nationalist revivalist movement represents the political anger of upper-caste, lower-middle class Indians, “who have uprooted themselves and their traditions, seduced by the promises

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70 For a recent discussion of the Supreme Courts decision to order a fresh probe into “India’s worst religious riots,” refer to “India Court orders fresh probe into 2002 Gujarat riot,” Reuters news (27 April 2009) http://www.reuters.com/article/homeneCrisis/idUSDEL442695.CH.2400.
71 As Bharucha argues, “abused and attacked by the forces of the Hindu Right, secularism received its most ignominious blow with the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992.” Rustom Bharucha, In the Name of the Secular, (1998): 2.
offered by the modernisation of indirect, and who now feel abandoned.”

This disenchantment has its foundations in the demise of imperialism, modernisation and secularisation in India and with the failure of development. For Nandy, “Hindutva at this plane is Western imperialism’s last frenzied kick at Hinduism.”

As one of those pathologies, which periodically afflict a faith or way of life, the inner workings of the ideology can be explained by a series of psychological defences already discussed. To this extent the ideology and horrific violence which erupted in Ayodhya cannot be understood as separate from the “social forces and the ideologies of dominance that have spawned.”

This is the end of long and complex processes that culminate in attempts to create a nationality under a reconstituted Hinduism. It is for Nandy, the end product of a century’s efforts to convert Hindus into a proper modern nation and ethnic majority: “Where the identity of the Hindus [a religious identity] is re-formulated and re-imagined through the ideology of Hindutva, as a monotheistic religion located in the shilyanya bricks that would be used to build the temple, the undisputed home of the solo-Hindu deity Ram.”

Why then, Nandy challenges, “Does the BJP talk of genuine as opposed to pseudo-secularism, and not religion?” In his writings on the modern and secular seeds of discontent, he depicts a modern Indian secular state that draws on the ideology of secularism, not as a means for controlling religious strife through secular tolerance, but rather as a way to now promote its inverted psychoanalytic double: xenophobia and fanaticism in the form of modern super-religious political allegiances with access to instrumental forms of violence. In working against minorities, attacking the inherent diversity and pluralism of the Indic Civilization, and belittling Indian national

75 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 1.
76 The process of seduction has included not only the promise of a good life but also the promise of a special political role for those having a modern education and modern professional skills. With the demise of imperialism, modernisation in India – particularly that subcategory of it which goes by the name of development – has failed to keep the promises. See Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 1.
77 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
78 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
79 A thorough analysis of these events is offered in Ashis Nandy et al., Creating a Nationality, (1995).
democratic slogans of Unity in Diversity, secularism of this kind can only represent “the blood-thirstiness of the Indian statists.”

3.4 A Culture of Containing Ambivalence: The Continuing Threat of the Other

The effects of the distortions of Hindutva ideology, and of secularism, in making over India in mono-cultural terms are evident in the way in which Indian culture has been altered. In “A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia” Nandy argues that these processes of subjection in Indian secular political culture and within Hindu nationalism have led to a culture of containing ambivalence. This is evident in the specific public culture that forms around these reconstituted political identities. Nandy focuses on a contemporary example to demonstrate the consequences of this culture of containing ambivalence. He refers to an incident in Bombay where a Muslim playwright wrote and staged a play. The narrative of the play included Hindu gods and goddesses as characters in the drama. According to Nandy the actions of the playwright in using Hindu gods and goddesses as characters provoked a highly political and defensive response. As he explains, “it provoked not the audience but a formation of Hindu nationalists, particularly the Hindu Mahasabha which had for long been a spent political force in Bombay, the city being dominated by another more powerful Hindu nationalist formation, the Shiv Sen.”

In particular, it provoked Vikram Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha the grandson of the non-Hindu believing Father of Hindutva V.D.Savarkar. Vikram Savarkar continued the “family business” and family traditions by staging a demonstration as an act of protest, in front of the theatre where the play was being shown. The demonstration that was less than peaceful, attracting large numbers and wide spread media coverage. It culminated in a dramatic publicly staged apology when the playwright bowed down and touched Savarkar’s feet. The apology was provided for allegedly disrespecting the sanctity of Hindu symbols and Hindu faith, in representing them as characters in the play. Savarkar and his supporters asserted that the playwright had no right to communicate in the language of Hinduism, even if this was a case of

82 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
84 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 130.
poetic licence, because he was not a Hindu. These images of the playwright’s apology to Savarkar by bowing down in front of him were widely disseminated in the media and printed in leading newspapers, thus consolidating the humiliation of the playwright. The concept of humiliation performs an interesting symbolic political function within this example, one that supersedes the personal moment of humiliation experienced by the playwright. For Nandy, the humiliation was complete because the apology functioned as a means of re-instating a boundary that had been transgressed, in allegedly_disrespecting Hinduism. It was also complete because it re-instated a dominant social, cultural, political and psychic order predicated on the exclusion of the Muslim playwright from accessing religious Hindu symbols.

Nandy comments on the political significance of humiliation in the following way. He notes that, “no humiliation is complete unless the humiliated feel humiliated and the creation of that feeling can be part of a political programme.” The humiliation of the playwright, through the political spectacle of apology is complete because it was constituted and staged within the political programme of the Hindu Mahasabha. However, it is from the perspective of the playwright that this outcome is achieved in Nandy’s analysis and not from Savarkar’s own public vocal declarations of a political victory. Nandy’s reading of these processes is a more ambivalent one, as he radically confronts and questions the conditions of this victory. This is a victory that is declared through the containment of the ambivalence of the subjectivity of the playwright and through the containment of a more open and plural account of Indianness. What, he critiques, are the way that the ambivalence within Indian traditions grounded in concepts of porous boundaries of self (including the Muslim self of the playwright) has been contained. This has been contained at the hands of the Hindu nationalists whose response to the playwright was deemed a political victory. Such a victory, for Nandy,

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86 This point about making an apology to Savarkar is interesting, especially when contrasted with the fact that two key political figures involved in the Ramjannabhum movement and responsible for the horrific violence carried out at Ayodhya refuse to offer a public apology for their complicity in these events. Both L.K. Advani, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat have refused to offer an apology for the crimes carried out at Ayodhya and Gujarat. For a discussion of this see Sumit Ganguly, “The Crisis of Indian Secularism,” Journal of Democracy, 14.4 (2003): 11-25. Robert D. Kaplan, “India’s New Face,” The Atlantic, (April 2009): 74-81.

87 In this article, Nandy argues that the political value of humiliation is recognised by ethnonationalists, particularly by Hindu Nationalists, although he distinguishes between the perceived experience of humiliation and the historical trajectory of this humiliation: for while “the sense of humiliation and feelings of inferiority in recent times is real, history serves as a projective test, and political propaganda works.” Ashis Nandy, “Humiliation: Politics and Cultural Psychology of the Limits of Human Degradation” (Opening Address at Humiliation Conference, Ranikhet, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Nirman Foundation, 2002): 12.
can only be mourned, as “[Hinduism] had lost because a tradition at least fifteen hundred years old was sought to be dismantled.”

In the essay Nandy draws on the Hindu motif of there being many “Gods and Goddesses,” to suggest that this performs an important symbolic function within the psychic life of the individual, and collectively within India. He suggests that for the majority of Indians these images and symbolic attachments perform a vital cultural and psychic function, although this pluralism is being threatened by the homogenising claims of the Hindu nationalists. The pluralism of the “Gods and Goddesses” acknowledges the myriad ways everyday life is lived and can be experienced as ambivalent and contradictory.

In the example of the playwright, Hindu nationalists affirmed their commitment to containing and abjecting pluralism and ambivalence from public view. In asserting a prohibition, barring access to that which is identified as pertaining exclusively to Hinduism, the boundaries between the playwright’s clearly demarcated Muslim identity, and what he is not – a Hindu – is asserted in the public sphere. In this case the boundaries of politics are also affirmed and consolidated through a distinctive repudiation of the other. What is problematic, for Nandy, are precisely the ways that these boundaries of identification dominate public space. As Sandria B. Freitag argues, “the real outcome of the Ayodhya story that must be measured with care is the extent to which negotiating space in India’s distinct civil society has disappeared.” For Freitag, only by understanding the extent of these changes can the consequences of making India Hindu be theorised. In Nandy’s account he too acknowledges that there is a loss of public space and of a public dialogue to negotiate identities, especially the boundaries of Indianness. Consistent with his psychoanalytic approach though, this is expressed as both a loss of external public space and a loss of internal psychic space. The way identities are therefore, imagined, performed, experienced and lived become truncated by processes of homogenisation, standardisation and deculturalisation.

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89 I develop this argument further in Chapter 6 when I explore the ways in which Nandy’s confrontation with secularism takes place at the threshold of politics. See Chapter 6 Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics.
91 In the following section of the dissertation I draw on Nandy’s contributions to the debates on Indian secularism to characterise this loss of public space and public debate. See Part B Symptomatic Responses: Reading the Politics of Blame.
The ambivalence that Nandy is interested in preserving is located in the dialectical interplay between external and internal processes. In his writings it is notably the ambivalent non-modern peripheral figure that carries forward this possibility and not a secular self or the Hindu zealot. The non-modern peripheral is privileged because as he explains, for those outside of politics, “their [the Gods and Goddesses] presence is telescoped not only into one’s transcendental self but, to use Alan Roland’s tripartite division, also into one’s familial and individualised selves and even into one’s most flippant, comic, naughty, moments.” The dialogue that the Gods and Goddesses invite provides access to a number of parts of one’s self without giving primacy to one aspect. Captured in the example of the Hindu Mahasabha and the playwright, “religion as ideology” casts away from view the everyday plural and ambivalent ways of being, ways of living, and the porous boundaries that demarcate self and other. He develops this claim further by suggesting that living with competing ethical systems, such as those represented in the different images of the Gods and Goddesses, is a characteristic feature of Indian life. In doing so he emphasises the range of possibilities available within broader imaginings of a cultural self; though consistent with his approach he resists defining this too closely. Rather he reinforces the point by noting the ambivalence and contradiction within every day accounts and experiences of Indianness, despite attempts to contain these features, are ever present. As he reiterates, “I have seen Indians live with enormous contradictions without batting an eyelid.”

Nandy demonstrates that contradiction is a feature of subjectivity, of an Indian self and a feature of Indian culture by retelling a story. The story is that when doing fieldwork for a book that the distinguished Indian Sociologist M.K.Srinivas was writing, he asked an Indian, “you are Brahmin and you are not supposed to work with leather, so why do you? He said to him that when I go out of my house I put on a shirt to go to the office and I become a different person. I leave my caste behind by putting on my office shirt and when I come back and I take my shirt off then my caste comes back to me, or something of this kind.” Nandy continues, “now this would be unthinkable, this kind of ethical system would be quite unthinkable in many other...

94 This story was told to me in the interview conducted with Nandy. This concept of contradiction and ambivalence was explored in the interviews conducted with Ashis Nandy, especially in Session III. See Christine Deffereos, Ibid., 13.
95 Christine Deffereos, Ibid., 13.
cultures and communities...you know they are contradictory. [But] contradiction does not bother you. You are willing to live with that contradiction.”96 The ability to live with contradictions and ambivalence facilitates tolerance for a certain kind of pluralism within self other relations, where he challenges, “it is presumed you will be able to do that.”97 This tolerance for plurality is not a product of modern secular identity, but reflected in experiences and practices of a different kind, in people’s ability to negotiate contradictions within self, as a dialectic between inner and outer incentives. For Nandy, this capacity also reaffirms the possibility of “a different kind of [Indian] modernity, where you can stand [this] you can live with enormous diversities and do not have to reconcile them constantly.”98 As he describes, “this concept [of tolerance] does not have the concreteness and definitive boundaries as it has in the European Judeo-Christian world. It is a bit more pagan”99 The internal tolerance for pluralism and competing ethical systems can be contrasted with a modern secular self or reconstituted political identity, where contradiction and ambivalence are contained by a “fixed identity.” Despite these processes of subjection operating in political identities, contradictions, ambivalence and pluralism are for Nandy important features of Indianess, including latent parts of self. What he concedes is confronting about this latent self is that it is derived from an “inner power, [and] has social-critical functions unacknowledged in most modern theories of legitimation.”100 In Nandy’s analysis ambivalence and pluralism have the potential to confront and work through the positioning of the boundaries of the external (public) and inner (private). For “it denies absolute value to any secular theory of society and it allows some knowledge to be subversive by allowing the users or producers of knowledge to take advantage of the contradiction between the outer and the inner powers.”101

I have argued that Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism is an extension of his confrontation with the cultural and psychological viability of secularism in India. In his analysis, it is the pathologies of secularism that provide the political conditions for the rise of adversarial national identities and which sustain political acts of violence. Hindu

96 Christine Deftereos, Ibid., 13.
97 Christine Deftereos, Ibid., 12.
101 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xviii.
nationalism is for Nandy a profoundly defensive movement that must be understood as part of complex historical, social, cultural, political and psychic processes to make India Hindu. The internal logic of Hindutva ideology needs to be understood alongside these efforts to contain ambivalence within concepts of Indianness. This is achieved in the ways that it re-positions the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in very distinct ways, and who can then make claims over India and Indianness. Nandy’s argument that the political voice of the Hindu zealot or Hindu nationalist is an effect of the distortions of a dominant secular ideology is a confronting proposition. Yet, as I have suggested, this willing confrontation is an important feature of his psychoanalytic reading of the way political identities in Indian political culture are formed.

In the next section of the dissertation I explore the way Nandy’s confronting arguments and ideas, along with his approach, informs the reception and representations of his work and identity as critic of the state. I offer a reading of the discursive field in which the debates of secularism are carried out, with an emphasis on the debates in the 1990s during this period when Indian secularism was radically tested. Nandy’s critique of secularism and his controversial claims receive a mixed reception from critics. The location of this mixed agitation yet also fascination for critics is I argue, in Nandy’s willingness to confront accepted identities, meanings, fantasies, projections and ideals operating in politics. This willingness to work through the complexities of subjectivity and at the borders between cultural and psychic processes produces a confronting self-reflexivity that can disarm critics. Of particular interest to my reading of these debates, are the ways that Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach, is dismissed by critics and/or overshadowed by the confronting claims he makes. The primary question I ask, is how Nandy’s own identity as critic of the state is made over in and through this discursive field? The second question structuring my analysis is to ask and what then do these representations tell us about the limits of debating Indian secularism?
PART B

Symptomatic Responses: Reading the Politics of Blame
“There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.”

Julia Kristeva
Powers of Horror
Chapter 4:
Ashis Nandy as Phobic Object and Abjection:
The Conceptual Battleground of Anti-Secularism and Culturalism

In the previous chapter, I explored Nandy’s critique of Hindu nationalism and its relationship to Indian secularism. Nandy’s psychoanalytic questioning of secularism and his critique of Hindu nationalism address the way the secular ideal distorts and remakes religious identities into political identities. For Nandy the ideology of secularism creates the political conditions for adversarial nationalities and affirms that the secular ideal is in crisis. Writing in 2007, Needham and Rajan the editors of a collection of essays titled The Crisis of Secularism in India reinforce this view. As they emphasise though, how this crisis of secularism “is to be interpreted and what, if anything, is to be done about it are matters of vigorous intellectual and political debate.”1 In Nandy’s analysis, writing twenty-five years earlier, this crisis is conceptualised and demonstrated through the pathologies of secularism. These pathologies are marked by the failure of secularism to safeguard tolerance and is complicit in fostering political discontent and violence. For Nandy, it is Indian secular political culture that has provided the conditions for the re-entry of religion into politics in reconstituted form, as political identities. The current declaration then of “a crisis in secularism,” thus needs to be understood alongside these long-term processes. The tragedies witnessed at Ayodhya and Gujarat has brought the effects and affects of these processes to the fore. At this point of forced engagement, during a period of national reflection, the contestation over how to respond to the “crisis” in secularism is heightened.

In the post-Ayodhya climate, Needham and Rajan also suggest that debates over the crisis of secularism have focused on this return of religion in politics. As they explain,

Religion’s role in the modern world has been vastly reconstituted and the crisis is not waged over matters of belief, but ‘it is instead religion as the basis of identity and identitarian cultural practices –

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with co-religionists constituting a community, nation, or ‘civilization’ – that comes to be the ground of difference and hence conflict.  

Such an account is consistent with Nandy’s critique of the ways that religious identities are reconstituted as political identities in Indian secular culture. Similarly, Nandy argues, Hindu nationalism capitalises upon, and further exploits the insecurities and anxieties implicit within identity politics, evidenced in claims over Indianness. Consistent with this claim a number of commentators argue that the crisis of secularism must be conceptualised within this climate of insecurity. This crisis must be understood within a “mainstream national culture that is fearful of diversities, intolerant of dissent unless it is cast in the language of the mainstream and panicky about any self-assertion or search for autonomy by ethnic groups.” Exploring the relationship between this mainstream national culture and Nandy’s confrontation with secularism provides an arresting case study into how these debates are structured. This includes an analysis of how Nandy is positioned within these debates and how his work is received and represented. And further, to consider to what extent the logic of argumentation operating within the debates also informs and/or forecloses possible representations of Nandy as critic of the state.

In this chapter, I explore the discursive field through which the debates on Indian secularism have been carried out, with an emphasis on representations of Nandy and his critique of secularism. I characterise the representations of Nandy’s critique of secularism and the continuing effects of his confronting claims. This includes critiquing how Nandy’s confrontation is understood and represented, along with the way that his identity as critic, his subjectivity and intellectual significance are represented, and as I argue, is made over in these debates. Drawing on a psychoanalytic framework, I claim that there is a persecutory logic that underpins these debates central to a politics of blame that structures the discursive responses and representations of critics like Nandy.

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What is worthy of analysis is not that Nandy’s work is highly contested but that this persecutory logic takes over and organises these responses and representations of him, as a figure who is both threatening and disruptive. The repetition of this logic takes over and further works to make over Nandy’s identity, subjectivity and significance in specific ways. The persecutory logic and this politics of blame thus forecloses an engagement with the complexity of Nandy’s ideas and the methods he adopts in formulating his confronting claims about secularism. In attempting to marginalise and de-authorise Nandy as critic it is his overwhelming threat and disruption that is defended against. I argue that these responses and representations take form in a symptomatic register, as typically Nandy’s arguments, ideas and methods are overshadowed by the threat and disruption that he poses. Moreover, Nandy’s confronting rejection of the secular ideal and his anti-secular position is the source of both horror and fascination. The politics of blame operating within this intellectual culture does so in defence of the dominant secular ideal and in the established boundaries of debate. Furthermore, it safeguards against the threat of Nandy’s anti-secular position. These symptomatic responses take form, as Freud argues, as a protective and defensive covering over, “in order to remove or rescue the ego from the situation of danger.” The danger, and the affective state of anxiety that Nandy’s anti-secularism provokes, is understood as a threat to the function the secular ideal performs in individual and collective processes of identification.

Within this discursive field, Nandy functions as a point of condensation for these anxieties, as he takes on the features of threat and disruption. In turn, he is represented repeatedly as an object of derision, taking on the features of a Freudian phobic object. Nandy’s identity and his mode of address are to be feared as his confrontation threatens the positioning of the boundaries of debate. I also suggest that Nandy acquires the status of the abject figure in these debates, as someone who carries forward the real and potential threat to disrupt established meanings, the boundaries of debate, and moreover the boundaries of subjectivity, between subject and object. Nandy is made over in these debates as that, which “…disturbs identity, system, order: it is the in between, the

ambiguous, the composite…the symptom of disintegrating boundaries.” These representations are evident in a number of critical responses though I develop this claim primarily through two examples. The first example where this reception and representation of Nandy is considered is in a chapter from Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularisation (1997) written by the Indian political scientist and activist Achin Vanaik. The second example I consider is an article published in 1999 in the Indian Journal Economic and Political Weekly by the political scientist Radhika Desai, a political scientist at the University of British Columbia, Canada. In both these examples there is more at stake than just academic quibbling. For both Vanaik and Desai respond to Nandy’s confrontation with a series of threatening and disruptive associations that symptomatically make over his identity as critic, and the significance attached to his identity. The symptom may function as a defence mechanism in these debates, but in the process it radically reconfigures discursive representations of Nandy’s subjectivity, his identity as critic, and the significance that can be afforded him and his and contributions to debating Indian secularism.

4.1 Indian Secularism and Debating the Positioning of the Boundaries of Debate

A survey of the literature debating Indian secularism reveals the full extent of the contestation that surrounds the concept. 8 This contestation includes debating whether the ideology of secularism, as an inherited western political ideal, is suitable to India and more importantly, how this informs the current state of “crisis” of Indian secularism. A number of theorists enter into the debates by qualifying their position in relation to this inheritance. For example, Partha Chaterjee argues that this inheritance imbuces postcolonial India with a shared vocabulary with western political theory that has at best an ambiguous legacy within India. This ambiguous legacy is also reflected in these debates and for Chatterjee, is central to understanding the ways these debates unfold. 9

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Nasir Tyabji extends on this further by noting that qualifying one’s position in relation to this inheritance is central to the debates. Tyabji suggests in the “Political Economy of Secularism: Rediscovery of India” written in 1994 that this is now also a distinct feature of the debates. He states that, “it is standard procedure in discussions of Indian secularism to make an initial proviso: while in Europe the process of secularisation incorporated the process of the separation of the state from the church, this has not been so in India.” According to Tyabji, this proviso becomes a normative feature of the debates. It establishes a boundary between those who claim this inheritance as central to the current crisis of Indian secularism and those who argue that this inheritance is a secondary concern to the “secular road” that Indian has taken of its own accord. In the work of the anthropologist T. N. Madan differentiating Indian secularism from its western foundations is not entirely possible. Defining Indian secularism brings us back to the problematic question of the inheritance of the concept. For Madan secularism remains “a gift of Christianity,” and sits uncomfortably with Indian home grown categories of knowledge and contemporary experiences. Nandy too in his critique of secularism confronts the disjunction that exists between the ideology of secularism instituted in the modern Indian state and peoples every day lived experiences. However, in Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach this disjunction reveals itself in the way the secular ideal structures processes of identification within Indian political culture and political identities. In particular, the secular ideal operates to make over religious and ethnic identities into political identities. He argues that this inherited western ideal must be confronted and rejected because these processes give rise to the pathologies of secularism. However, for Madan and Nandy challenging and rejecting the secularism based on this inheritance leaves them open to a number of criticisms.

Joseph Tharamangalam’s analysis of the debates of secularism conceptualises the debates and the role of theorists like Madan and Nandy further. Tharamangalam points out that, “Critical social science [in India] became inextricably bound with the basic ‘project’ of the enlightenment, human liberation premised on a critique of society.”

The debates on secularism can thus be understood as representative of the way social science has developed. Thus Madan and Nandy’s critique of secularism must also be understood as part of a broader critique with modernity. However, Tharamangalan sees little alternative to India’s inheritance, dismissing the voices of Nandy and Madan as profoundly anti-secular and anti-modern voices. As he argues, “critics such as Ashis Nandy and T.N Madan reject secularism as radically alien to Indian culture and tradition and advocate a return to genuine religion and the indigenous traditions of religious tolerance as the best means to preserve and maintain a pluralist and multi-religious Indian society.”

Tharamangalam casts Nandy and Madan as advocating a return to genuine religion and an indigenous culturalism: and it is here Tharamangalam suggests that their anti-secularism is to be found. What is interesting about this representation of Nandy and Madan is that their position is radically questioned, primarily for is disruptive features. For as Tharamangalam states: “I am unable to see what kind of a social and political order can replace India’s secularism without causing serious rupture to those social arrangements, values and ideals in the country that most of us deeply cherish.”

The value of Nandy and Madan’s contributions to debating secularism, therefore, needs to be understood as disruptive. Tharamangalam cannot imagine an alternative to this secular ideal and, in affirming this, casts doubt on the validity of these claims. To this list of potential threatening critical voice he also adds the sociologist M.S. Srinivas “who has called for a renewal of faith in god as saviour in order to meet India’s cultural crisis.”

Other theorists too have argued that secularism is a western concept inappropriately applied to Indian political culture without respect for the profound religiosity of the Indian people.

15 Joseph, Tharamangalam, Ibid., 457.
16 Joseph, Tharamangalam, Ibid., 461.
17 Joseph, Tharamangalam, Ibid., 457.
Gyanendra Pandey has conceptualised this further by arguing that colonial bureaucratic rationality was responsible for the creation of religious and caste identities as political categories. The consequences of these complex historical processes are now surfacing as central to the “crisis” of Indian secularism. For Pandey, this rationality informs the current proto-secular and anti-secular or communalist divide underpinning these debates. This divide takes form irrespective of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s critique in arguing that this modernist rationalism can never comprehend the character of religion in India. While the debate over the inheritance of these concepts remains, the divide and the boundary that emerges around these issues is significant. Shrinivas Tilak adds to a reading of the boundary that forms around these issues and through which the debates of Indian secularism are carried out. In Tilak’s account the debates unfold with “idealizing on the one hand, and scapegoating and persecuting on the other.” To follow through on Tilak’s account, those who demonstrate their commitment to the secular ideal, particularly as proto-secularists are rewarded and idealised, whilst those like Nandy, who confront this ideal and work through its idealised features, are persecuted and dismissed. Therefore, according to this persecutory logic those who confront and in Nandy’s case, reject the secular ideal, even if this is a result of having explored its cultural and psychological viability, are cast as intolerant, as outsiders and as “arch tyrants.”

The proto-secular and anti-secular divide informs the claims made by Sarah Joseph in the “Politics of Contemporary Indian Communitarianism.” In this article, she identifies a number of contributors to the debates who do so as Indian Communitarians, emphasising the regressive and disruptive features of these voices. These communitarians include Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee Sudipto Kaviraj and T.N Madan. Joseph argues that what unites and characterises these theorists is that they “have made a link between community consciousness and indigenous culture and this has supported their political project of reviving communities political actors today.”

22 Tilak Shrinivas, in Arvind Sharma, ed., Ibid., 126.
What is interesting about Joseph’s article is the way that she connects intellectual debate to a distinctive political project. In doing so, her article works to politicise the identities of these contributors in terms of their intellectual significance but also in terms of their political significance. According to Joseph, Nandy’s contributions to debating secularism need to be exposed for its communalist foundations, and its complicity with the contemporary political project of the Hindu Right. For Chatterjee, these very demarcations, including identifying anti-secular voices as communitarian, brings us back to the problematic question of the inheritance of these categories. For as Chaterjee emphasises even when declaring the “well-defined Indian referents, the loud and often acrimonious Indian debate on secularism is never entirely innocent of its western genealogies.”

This is also evident in the way in which European and American concepts of secularism continue to inform the boundaries of debate, and, in turn, “the inevitable shortcomings of the Modern State in India.”

Meera Nanda invokes these representations in her analysis of the rise of communalism, or as she prefers, the wrongs of the religious right. In her text The Wrongs of the Religious Right: Reflections on Science, Secularism and Hindutva (2005), Nanda offers an assessment of the crisis of Indian secularism by comparing the secularity of the Indian state to American secularism. Nanda draws on the work of Donald Smith and his definition of secularism. According to Donald’s definition, a state is secular if it meets four conditions. These being, if it: (a) guarantees individual and corporate freedoms of religion; (b) deals with the individual as citizen irrespective of his religion; (c) is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion; and finally, (d) does not seek either to promote or interfere with religion. Where, according to Nanda, Indian secularism falls short is on the fourth condition that “the State does not seek either to promote or interfere with religion.”

What follows is that thus Indians have an incorrect concept of secularism compared to their American counterparts, despite the growing body of literature questioning the secularity of American politics. In Nanda’s

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25 Partha Chatterjee, Ibid., 1769.
analysis, this deviation from the secular ideal in India is a marker of the failure of the secularity of the Indian state. Further, for Nanda it also explains, “…Why modernity in India has this feel of incompleteness, superficiality and even schizophrenia.”

Nanda argues that it is only through the (re)affirmation of a strengthened Indian secular state which theorists like Nandy reject, that these issues can be redressed.

In the debates there are a number of calls to strengthen India’s commitment to the secular ideal, as a means of responding to the current crisis in secularism. This position is evident in the work of the philosopher Akeel Bilgrami whose contributions are part of broader efforts to regenerate secularism as “something more than a holding process.” For Bilgrami, theorists like Nandy who reject this position are radically questioned as to whether they can even be understood as contributing to the debates on secularism. In Bilgrami’s account “Nandy does not even get “to the terms of meaningful debate about secularism, but dangerously derail[s] it.”

Rajeev Bhargava challenges the proto-secular and anti-secular logic operating in the debates by suggesting that an alternative concept and intellectual space is needed. He states that, “in my view the real challenge before us continues to be one of working out an alternative conception of secularism rather than simply an alternative to it.” Such efforts have been critiqued by Chatterjee who maintains that these attempts to situate new meanings as “a matter of family resemblances” only works to strengthen the existing western political discourse about the modern state, whereby “the resort to ‘new

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32 Akeel Bilgrami, Ibid., 1760.
meanings’ [including alternative conceptions] is to invoke…a mark of the failure of this attempt.”

John J. Carroll suggests that the late entry of secularism into the Indian Constitution needs to be taken into account. As Carroll points out, the term secularism is a late addition to the Indian Constitution, being formally incorporated in the preamble in 1976 through an amendment made by the Indira Gandhi Government. While the amendment codifies the general understanding of the nature of the Indian State, theorists like Rao maintain that the original document contains a number of provisions that in totality lacks “conceptual clarity.” For Dharma Kumar, the corrective is to be found in the legislative function of the Indian State that can clarify and institute the effective implementation of the secular ideal through legal processes and State apparatuses. Deviations from this goal, and the positioning of this boundary, are for Kumar to side with the Left Secularists, who like the Communalists, bear “several marks of politically motivated scholarship.” Whether or not these charges are substantiated, Kumar’s association reinforces an established boundary operating within the debates. Theorists like Tejani conclude that there is now a characteristic impasse within these debates. Tejani describes this in the following way: “those accused of bringing religion into politics are called communalists, those seen as pandering to religious minorities are branded as pseudo-secularists, and those charged with wanting to introduce Western (secular) modes of governance and ethics are pilloried as Macaulayites. The debate has been circumscribed by its own categories.” This is a useful assessment about how these boundaries of debate are positioned and further are now working against its own interests to foreclose debate. The positioning of the boundaries in this way, as circumscribed by their own categories, perpetuates a series of defensive and counter-defensive responses that are reproduced as a feature of these debates. However, such responses ultimately do little to expand the boundaries of debate and the possibility for

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debate by placing distinct limits on what can and cannot be debated. Further, it places limits on what constitutes “meaningful critique” within this discursive field.  

4.2 The Defensive Structure of the Symptomatic

Writing in 1992, the editors of a special edition of the journal Seminar titled “The Problem,” make the following assessment about Indian secularism. They state, “What was a vision, a living language, froze into a dead grammar.” For these authors, the problem with secularism or rather the crisis of secularism needs to be understood in terms of a loss of a vision. This is equally reflected they suggest in a loss of dialogue, debate and dissent over what secularism is and how it can be understood in India. “What kind of dialogue, concrete and practical, has Indian culture showed evidence of?” they ask. Dialogue and debate they maintain has been foreclosed, circumscribed by its own categories, and consequently, the concept of secularism has become a symptom of this stagnation. The symptomatic takes form as a result of the closure of debate and is central to understanding “the problem” with secularism and moreover, its current state of “crisis.” Consistent with a psychoanalytic reading of the symptom, the symptom forms in Freudian psychoanalysis as a protective mechanism, to defend the ego from threat and danger. Closing the debate in this way can thus be understood as a defence of the secular ego ideal, and as a defence of the ego integrative function that secularism performs within processes of identification, including political identities and national identities. Any threats to the secular ideal are therefore experienced as real or even potential threats to self and as a threat to the ontological security of the boundaries of self. The symptom emerges as a response and as a defence mechanism against threats, disruptions and insecurity. However, what is problematic about this is that the symptom, understood as a defence mechanism also carries forward its own internal logic. For “the symptom is entrusted with the representing of important interests [and in doing so] it acquires a value for self-assertion; it becomes intertwined more and more

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40 As the authors state, “The magical words of our childhood were nation, science, secularism, development, reason, progress. Yet all these words have lost their fire. If democracy is to be sustained we must revitalize the dialogue around these words. The older notion of democracy which relied on this thesaurus of words won’t do. They need to be defined and redefined through continuous conversation.” See Shiv Visvanathan, and Susan Visvanathan, “The Problem,” Seminar, (394) (June) (1992): 14.
41 See Shiv Visvanathan, and Susan Visvanathan, Ibid., 15.
intimately with the ego, becoming even more indispensable to the later.”

Freud’s comments in this passage provide a deeper understanding as to why the symptomatic acquires a value for self-assertion. Within these responses to the debates on secularism this is evident in the over-determined representations of Nandy, as the symptom acquires “a value for self-assertion.” For the editors of the journal, positioning the boundaries of debate in this way can also be understood as a defence against a perceived threat to established meanings. The editors argue that debating secularism has become foreclosed, and can now be understood in terms of those who defend against those challenging these dominant established meanings. There is a politics of blame that forms around those that challenge the secular ideal and those that work to preserve it. For example, in Joseph’s article this threat is discernable and defended against by identifying Nandy as an Indian communitarian, and in situating him in a particular place within these debates. For theorists like Dharma, Nandy carries forward an unequivocal threat and disruption, to the point where his identity and significance becomes “unclassifiable.” The symptomatic register is established by a persecutory logic. This logic forecloses an engagement with the complexity of Nandy’s ideas and the methods that he adopts in formulating his confronting claims about secularism. It also forecloses an engagement with the complexity of Nandy’s ideas.

This persecutory logic is evident in the work of Zaheer Baber who argues that Nandy has “been quite prolific in issuing ‘anti-secular manifestos.’” This representation is taken further as Baber accuses Nandy of “spearheading the emerging culture of academic anti-secularism in India.” For Baber, Nandy is to be feared because his anti-secularism, and hence, all the anti-secularism that marks academic discourse, is complicit with the Hindu Right. Stanley J. Tambiah continues to counter this anti-secular intellectual movement captured in what he terms is the Madan-Nandy thesis. What is notable about Tambiah’s reading of this anti-secularism is that he raises

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“a more pointed objection to Nandy.”\footnote{Tambiah, Stanley J., “Transnational Movements, Diaspora and Multiple Modernities,” \textit{Daedalus}, 124(1) (2000): 163-194.} Within such accounts, Nandy becomes the focal point, functioning like a point of condensation, as he is made over as the figure primarily responsible for continuing disruption. For Baber, Nandy’s prolific anti-secular voice is to be feared because, both intellectually and politically, it is complicit with the politics of the Hindu Right in India. Nandy becomes the point of condensation for the affective states of disruption, fear, threat and anxiety. As Julia Kristeva suggests, “the phobic object shows up at the place of non-objectal states of drive and assumes all the mishaps of drive as disappointed desires or as desires diverted from their objects.”\footnote{The object of fear is, in other words, a substitute formation for the subject’s fear caused by the breakdown of any distinction between subject and object, of any distinction between the world of dead material objects and us. See Julia Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection}, (New York: Columbia University Press,1982): 35.}

In Kristeva’s reading, the object of fear, the Freudian phobic object, becomes a substitute formation, a projection carrying the weight of disappointed desires caused by a breakdown in the boundaries distinguishing subject and object, self and other. What is threatening about the phobic object is its disruptive potential as Nandy, along with his anti-secularism, also carries forward the capacity to breakdown established meanings and signification. This moment is radically threatening because the breakdown in meaning and signification is perceived as an assault to one’s own boundaries of selfhood. As Tharamangalam has already expressed, this is an assault to established arrangements, values and ideals that the majority of Indians deeply cherish. The defensive structure of such symptomatic responses is repeated in Akeel Bilgrami’s work. For Bilgrami, the threat of the phobic object is that Nandy harks back “nostalgically [and dangerously] to the idea of a pre-modern India.”\footnote{Akeel Bilgrami, “Two Concepts of Secularism,” (1994): 1749.} Bilgrami distinguishes Nandy from other anti-secularists like Partha Chatterjee whose contributions to the debates are marked by an inconsistency. In contrast to this, Nandy’s threat is exacerbated and over-determined as he becomes a figure “who is nothing if not consistent” in his commitment to religious communities and to an anti-secular position.\footnote{Akeel Bilgrami, \textit{Ibid.}, 1750.} For Bilgrami, it is this consistency that marks and identifies Nandy from other critics of secularism and also determines his influence amongst the general intelligentsia. Evident in “the words of his pages [which] leave nothing undetermined;
there are no elements in his work running counter to his undistracted animus toward modernity.”

Within the critiques outlined there is, as suggested, a distinctive persecutory logic that emerges organising these modes of reception and representation: Ashis Nandy as phobic object and as the abject. Two further examples emphasise the ways in which these representations take over and make over Nandy’s identity as critic, his subjectivity and significance. The first example I consider is Achin Vanaik’s text *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularisation*, in the chapter titled “Communalism, Hindutva, Anti-Secularists: The Conceptual Battleground,” published in 1997. The second response written two years later is to be found in Radhika Desai’s article titled “Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva” published in *Economic and Political Weekly* and reprinted in a later version in the text *Slouching Towards Ayodhya: Three Essays* (2004). What both these examples demonstrate are the ways in which this persecutory logic operates within a symptomatic register, as Ashis Nandy becomes the phobic object and the abject. Thus both Vanaik and Desai demonstrate the intensity of the symptom in safeguarding the ego, as a defence of a secular ideal and the ego integrative function that a secular political identity performs within Indian culture. Nandy, in challenging these processes, leaves himself open to a series of threatening associations around his own identity, whereby his conceptual flaws are emphasised and identity, significance and integrity made over.

These conceptual claims are largely organised around Nandy as the leading voice of anti-secularism and anti-modernism within India, but also include the more damaging charges of his political complicity with the rise of the contemporary Right’s cultural politics. In both examples, from Vanaik and Desai critiques, Nandy’s disruption and threat is connected to his strong culturalism, though for Desai this is more aptly expressed as an “irrationalised elite culturalism.” According to Desai, Nandy exacerbates his own irrational argument further, as his intellectual identity does not comply with the markers of traditional scholarly prose and academic conventions.

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Rather his phobic features take over and within this intellectual culture cannot be taken seriously, given, as Desai affirms, “the significance of Ashis Nandy is not intellectual.” If the significance of Nandy and his work are not intellectual, then the question remains as to what precipitates Desai’s fascination and horror? In both responses, Nandy represents the threat and disruption of abjection, and consequently elicits from these critics a combination of fascination and horror. The disruption of the abject for Vanaik is evident in Nandy’s “form of big thinking which abjures the scholarly prerequisites of developing substantial expertise across disciplines.” Cast as the “not-yet-subject,” the abject figure lacks intellectual integrity, located at the threatening borderlands of anti-secularism, anti-modernism and political culturalism. For Vanaik and Desai defending the established boundaries of debate, both responses and representations ensure that, that which is defined as abject is cast from view and remains outside the boundaries of intellectual significance.

4.3 Nandy as the Leading and most Intransigent Anti-Secular Figure

Achin Vanaik’s text *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularisation* (1997) contributes to the theorising the crisis of Indian secularism during the 1990s. Vanaik questions the secularity of the Indian state within his changing political landscape, and growing support for Hindu nationalism. For Vanaik, Hindu nationalism stands in opposition and as a direct threat to the secular ideal and, to this extent, shares a conceptual space with communalism. He also defends the secular ideal within Indian history against a growing intellectual trend of anti-secularism, or as he prefers, “subaltern indigenisms.” In the Chapter titled “Communalism, Hindutva, Anti-Secularists: The Conceptual Battleground,” Vanaik explores the features of this intellectual culture. For Vanaik, the debates can be defined as a conceptual battleground, shifting between the boundaries that mark secularism, anti-secularism, and Hindutva, or communalism. For Vanaik, these concepts and the dynamics that they generate are central to understanding the precariousness of Indian politics. The

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57 It is important to note that this alone does not constitute Vanaik’s entire argument put forward in the text which is not evaluated fully here. However, a large part of the arguments explored are organised around this increasing scepticism about the value of secularism and secularisation within India. It is this aspect of the argument and his critique of anti-secular forces, including an emerging anti-secular intellectual culture within India, which are relevant to the discussion and elaborated upon here.
conceptual differences and hence, the boundary that distinguishes these positions are explained by the varying emphasis each ideology places on culture, civilisation, Hinduism and caste. However, for Vanaik the boundary between anti-secularism and Hindutva has increasingly been threatened. In Vanaik’s reading, anti-secularism cannot be so easily distinguished from Hindutva, even as an intellectual position, as both increasingly share a conceptual space.

Having defined the conceptual battleground in this way according to these boundaries, the boundaries of the debate that Vanaik enters into are also clearly established. Anti-secularism is defined by opposing communalism but not in defence of a westernised concept of secularism; rather it is through a supposedly authentic indigenism based on a recovery of India’s religious traditions. For Vanaik this anti-secularism carries forward a dangerous and threatening affinity with communalism. The threat that this growing anti-secularism presents to secularism is now displaced into a more generalised fear of a deeper complicity with religious and communal life. The dynamics of debate within his work return to a forceful disavowal of this alternative position. There is a distinctive threatening association established, evident when he asserts that this anti-secularism can be understood “as legitimising implicitly when not explicitly the assault by communal forces (above all political Hindutva) against the current level of secularity of the state.”

For Vanaik, this bears an uncanny resemblance to an already firmly established threatening position politicised by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and their calls for positive secularism to counter the pseudo secularism that has been spawned. If religious toleration were to dominate concepts of national amity, this would involve practicing sarva dharm sambhavam or the belief in an equal respect to all religions. This in itself is not necessarily problematic for Vanaik, but it takes on particularly dangerous and threatening form in the hands of the BJP and their calls for a Hindu India. Any conceptual differences, therefore, begin to collapse within Vanaik’s account as the complicities between anti-secularism and a communal or proto-Hindu national imaginary begin to take form. Overwhelmed by the frightening and threatening possibilities, the differences between these intellectual positions, along with their political implications, are collapsed into a more generalised phobic association. So too

then collapses the argument that this form of anti-secularism might represent a possible alternative or even meaningful contribution to debating secularism.

Having established this anti-secular position as complicit with communalism, he turns to three key exponents of this position within these debates whose authority and salience he disputes. In India, he argues that the three most important spokespersons for this anti-secularism are Bhinku T. Parekh, T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy. Even though he suggests that there are significant intellectual differences between them, he nonetheless, aligns these voices. He suggests that these spokespersons are united more by what they are against, that is their disavowal of the secular ideal, rather than by any affirmative contribution to these debates. Hence, the threatening possibility which they represent in the debates is not generated from the force of an alternative anti-secular position advanced but from the disruption which this repudiation of the ideal causes. In Vanaik’s exposition, there are six general themes which provide the reference points for understanding this disruption: the issue of modernity; the role of culture, civilisation, religion and Hinduism within Indian society, both past and present; secularism and secularisation; particularism and universalism; individualism and communitarianism; and neo-Gandhianism. It is important to note that these differences are not as significant for Vanaik as is the idiom of this critique, distinctively anti mode: the voice, it can be argued, of the provocateur. It is these anti oppositional modes of engagement that lead him to explore the “anti-modern stridencies,” in his discussion of Ashis Nandy. Although Vanaik identifies three anti-secular theorists, he affords particular attention to Madan and Nandy’s critiques of secularism that he suggests share a number of similarities. As the chapter proceeds, Nandy can be further demarcated not only for these anti- secular views, but also for his distinctive anti-modern stridencies.

Nandy occupies a privileged position within Vanaik’s critique and, in carrying forward this threat, becomes, “the most intransigent of these anti- secularists.” However, the force of Nandy’s disruption and threat to positioning of the boundaries of these debates does not end there as a number of additional phobic traits are identified, namely that, “he is also the most uncompromising in his hostility to history, to the

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61 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 153.
project of modernity, and the one most determined to read Gandhi as an anti-modernist.” Vanaik does concede that the anti-modernism advocated by Nandy may be a meaningful political choice, but is less forgiving of his reading of culture and civilisation. The problem is not with this position per se but that in the hands of an intellectual like Nandy, this becomes distorted or rather subsumed by the phobic features of its proponent. The fear of the phobic object in this moment is the fear of an intellectually untrustworthy voice, or a voice, which lacks authenticity and integrity. Vanaik reinforces the representation of Nandy as a figure that carries forward the possibility of disrupting established boundaries. For “Nandy’s understandings of religion, culture, society, civilization are not markedly different from many a culturalist or immortaliser of religion.”

Vanaik does not necessarily engage in the details of Nandy’s argument regarding religion and culture, other than to establish Nandy’s efforts as synonymous with those of the culturalist. Nandy, as a phobic object, also invokes a resemblance to a prior threat here and, with the return of religion, becomes the embodiment of this abjected immortaliser of religion. Vanaik ultimately raises objections to Nandy’s reading of culture and civilisation, because it is laced with the culturalism he is warning us against. Nandy’s anti-modernism represents a conceptually flawed distinction between the incompatibility of modernity with tradition and culture, and it is this distinction which Vanaik also takes issue with: to accept the conditions of modernity is deemed to be anti-culture and to be an anti-modernist is to be profoundly concerned with culture. The simplicity of the distinction is a reductionist one, but the illusion of the boundaries at play prevents a deeper engagement and more thorough critical analysis of these accepted distinctions. From this point, he then enters into a series of generalisations and associations of Nandy’s formulation and understanding of culture, civilisation and religion, where culture is understood as a way of life firmly implanted within indigenous knowledge systems, traditions and forms of subjectivity. For Nandy, Vanaik assures us that, “it means a culture dominated by religious consciousness that has not competed for the minds of men but offered itself as a lifestyle within which other

62 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 154.
63 Vanaik states that this stance of anti-modernism is a meaningful political choice today, because even in the face of the undoubted power of modernists and of modernising processes, it speaks for a still enormously powerful constituency, the authentic Indian masses for whom culture and therefore tradition remains paramount. See Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 162.
64 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 162.
lifestyles can be accommodated.”⁶⁵ Vanaik then laments a loss of critical consciousness and the blind faith advocated and “that most of the time, Nandy sees religion as virtually isomorphic with culture.”⁶⁶ This representation organised around the threats of the phobic object, prevents Vanaik from engaging with Nandy’s confrontation and the psychoanalytic focus that defines his conceptualisation of culture, civilisation and society.⁶⁷

Here Nandy becomes not only a threatening and disruptive force, but, like the abject figure, is one who lacks integrity. Vanaik asks, “…but could it be that becoming a serious social thinker might require strenuous efforts to develop other disciplinary skills including those of history?”⁶⁸ Further still, in undermining Nandy’s contributions to the debates, Vanaik suggests that, “critical modernists are therefore feeble counter players or ornamental dissenters who should not ever be mistaken for serious critics.”⁶⁹ This reveals the persecutory logic invoked in re-affirming the positioning of the boundaries developed and sustained within Vanaik’s analysis: firstly, there is a repudiation of counter-players, or ornamental dissenters who are recognised for their disruption, opposition and threat to an established order; secondly, these dissenters, along with their efforts in re-positioning the terms of engagement, cannot be accepted as serious critics. Vanaik, therefore, raises the question as to what constitutes valid or authentic dissent within this intellectual culture and within these debates, a question that is central to understanding the politics of blame at play. To define Nandy as an ornamental dissenter is to undermine the possibility that accompanies this threat and disruption. In doing so, Vanaik reveals Nandy’s abject status as a disruption to scholarly debate, but also as lacking integrity and value.

This provides Vanaik with the impetus to further question Nandy’s methods, particularly his reading of culture and modernity, which are broadly described as possessing typical mentalities. One such example of this is Nandy’s appropriation of critical traditionalism, used as a counter position to the dominant and homogenising features of modernity. Nandy’s use of critical traditionalism is, as Vanaik highlights, drawn from Gandhi. This technique of making an individual personality or a personality

⁶⁶ As Vanaik maintains, “so to understand a civilization is to understand a culture(s) is to understand a religious system(s) is to understand the mind of an authentic inmate of that culture.” See Achin Vanaik, *Ibid.*, 163.
⁶⁷ In this respect, Vanaik reads Nandy’s position as determined by his phobic features.
type “stand in” as an expression of larger social processes is, we are told, “his favoured taxonomies of culture and society.”

So the methodology is radically questioned as dubious and an allegiance between Nandy and his work with Gandhian tenants is established. The reader is left feeling that Nandy’s intellectual integrity falls short here and that intellectual argumentation is fostered more by the whimsical techniques described by Vanaik, who remains dubious and fearful of these methods. He states that, “this has not fazed Nandy, whose project is avowedly to ‘recover’ an indigenous social science.”

Nandy’s anti-modernism, alongside his commitment to indigeneity, already established disruptive threats within this intellectual culture and now extends to a responsibility for an indigenous social science.

Even Nandy, as the voice of a political psychologist with an interest in the cultural psychology of Indian politics, is met with irreverence by Vanaik who would acknowledge the merits of such a task but that, “it leads in his hands to the construction of a grandiose paradigm of anti-modernism, forging an Alternative Science, another theory of universalism which will compete with and oppose Enlightenment universalism itself!”

The resistance to Nandy’s anti-secularism is directly linked to his overt anti-modernism or rejection of the Enlightenment vision. Vanaik invokes a persecutory logic to again re-affirm a series of conceptually flawed and disruptive differences, which distinguish him from this object of fear. Another point of differentiation is in Nandy’s use of the term secularism and secularisation. These terms, he suggests, are used casually and in a careless way for someone so hostile to the concept. Within Nandy’s work “secularisation and secularism have an invariant relationship” and for Vanaik, at least in India, there has been a real disjunction between the two.

Vanaik dismisses the tenants of Nandy’s argument and the psychic life of power. Vanaik rejects Nandy’s argument that the Indian state and the secular elite have attempted to “make it popular, to vernacularise it, or to attempt to give it wider and deeper roots.”

From the outset, then, the conceptual differences between Vanaik’s understanding of secularism and processes of secularisation in India with those proposed by Nandy, establish a persecutory divide. Within this logic, Vanaik

70 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 164.
71 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 164.
72 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 164.
73 Vanaik builds an argument around the fact that the Secularisation process and specific histories of modernisation and nationalism have generally been more important for explaining the emergence of secular states than the ideology of secularism. See Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 169.
74 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 170.
demonstrates his defence by re-establishing a boundary of demarcation to ward off this disruption to self and other. He becomes in this moment of defence the corrective voice.

The corrective or re-assertion of the boundaries of debate is Vanaik’s own reading of secularism. He re-asserts that the boundaries of engagement within the defence of the secular ideal are ones that should not fall prey to the shortcomings or rather disruptive and threatening features of Nandy’s work. Vanaik identifies a number of mistakes Nandy makes and, in doing so, re-asserts the boundaries of debates with his corrective voice. Firstly, Nandy treats secularism as a synecdoche, therefore connecting the ideology of secularism with the complicities of the nation state system. Secondly, to accept the ideology of secularism is to accept the ideologies of progress and modernity as the new justifications of domination. The connection between secularism and statehood filtered through the ideologies of progress and modernity is met with suspicion here. In short we are told that this is not correct. Vanaik, instead, presents his own corrective in contrast to Nandy’s formulation and, although not pursued in any great detail here, is largely organised around a defence of the concept. The main concern worth reinforcing is that Nandy gets it wrong and that this carries with it a set of intellectual, political and moral consequences which for Vanaik cannot be ignored and which he continues to detail. These interests are further validated by a chain of threatening signifiers namely Nandy’s strong culturalism (including the chain of signification which follows from this: his anti-modernism, his anti-secularism, his anti-science position, his anti-universalism, his anti-statism and so on and so forth) combined with his scholarly inadequacies.

Vanaik presents his own corrective voice within the text to argue that particular values are necessary within a secular state. These differ significantly from Nandy

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75 Vanaik continues that for Nandy, “secularism is an ideology which legitimises those who exercise state power and the structures of the state itself, because it promotes the view that the irrational, religious masses lack the rationality of modernisation and because, for modernisation the state is crucial.” Achin Vanaik, Communalism Contested, (1997): 170.

76 Vanaik’s own defence is based on the premise that “secularism itself is not an ideology of statehood; it is an ideology which endorses a particular principle of modern statehood, a principle that emerges historically as part of the modern democratic revolution. That is why, even etymologically, the word secularism comes much after the words secular or state.” This is a new principle of democratic individualism and any consistent assault on secularism, for example by Nandy, will also assault modern notions of democracy and individualism.” Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 171.

77 His position is made explicit when he states that, “In the relationship between religion and the individual, it enshrines the right to freedom of worship. For the relationship of the state to the individual, there would be the primacy of the notion of citizenship, where this is not conceived of as linked to any fixed property or attribute of any particular individual or group. Regarding the relationship between religion and the state, the latter should be religiously non-affiliated and impartial. Formal non-affiliation
who, according to Vanaik, draws from another anti-modernist figure, Gandhi, using Ghandhi’s values to validate his argument. Under the strong hold influence of Gandhi’s imago, like a dedicated disciple complying with his guru’s wishes, Vanaik argues that Nandy cannot accept the ethical foundations of the secular state. This neo-Gandhianism means, “he shares his mentor’s view of what constitutes proper justice.” Nandy now takes on the additional features of an ethically questionable position, in so far as he is represented as an advocate of religious-based public morality as opposed to a public morality informed and organised by the guiding principles of secularism. Nandy’s intellectual, though now also moral and political commitment epitomises the dialogue between the religious and the secular. Yet the tension that this generates in Nandy’s critique of secularism and within his identity as critic is overlooked here, as Nandy’s sympathies and affiliations are defined in more simplistic terms. Vanaik thus reads a normative argument into Nandy’s position when he suggests that he reads religion-based public morality as superior to modern secular notions of public morality. He affirms that Nandy’s interests lie with the justification of ultimate moral values, ones that are to be found in all the major religious systems. This alternate focus on values, traditions or moral codes of order which pre-date modernity and are to be found within the principle of tolerance inherent within these systems is held together by a shared belief in transcendence. Vanaik does acknowledge that Nandy’s critique of secularism has to some extent a psychoanalytic component. This dimension of Nandy’s analysis is, though, dismissed on the following grounds. As Vanaik states for Nandy, “In vibrant religious-cultural systems the believer has a fluid self, a configuration of selves.” Yet this is rejected for a preferred and already established definition of selfhood. “All talk by Nandy,” he tells us “of the special fluidity of the pre-modern self is utterly mistaken.” The account of the self that Nandy invokes disrupts the confines of the

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78 Here Vanaik maintains that Gandhi’s, “customary law is said to be superior to modern law because the litigant is treated not as a “passive object” but as an individual in a given community. Judgment of the litigant’s behaviour should aim, above all, at promoting introspection and, therefore, self-correction. This is a conception of justice not as fairness but, above all, as a contributor to self-mastery. Achin Vanaik, *Ibid.*, 171.

79 Vanaik argues that transcendence is crucial to Nandy’s formulation of tolerance because it expresses, as states, “a distinctive psychology of the believer.” Further reading on this is at Achin Vanaik, *Ibid.*, 173.

80 This is fluid because it incorporates the self, the non-self and the anti-self. There is an empirical, perishable self as well as an imperishable, transcendent self, thus a distinctive “wholeness of the self” which the more well-bounded self of modernity undermines. Achin Vanaik, *Ibid.* 173.

81 Again, for Vanaik, this claim is based on false premises. “The pre-modern self” he tells us “is not a more fluid but a more diffuse self because of the lack of sharp boundaries. But the range over which the
self-image that Vanaik understands as the pre-modern self. Vanaik, therefore, violently resists the potential loss of meaning, the threat, disruption and ambiguity that the abject presents in this moment. The fluid self is in this moment a threat to the ontological security of a self-image that is grounded in the order of a secular account of subjectivity and inter-subjective relations. The threat and dangers of this position, and not its critical contribution to debate, remain when he tells us, “So the religious community must be seen as a, if not the, principal political and social unit in the construction of the desired anti-modernist project.”

Through this representation, Nandy becomes made over as the immortaliser of religion is then assured. The moral dangers of this position carried forward by the abject figure are reiterated within Vanaik’s critique. After all, Nandy’s position on secularism “is a credo which in virtually every major respect rests on mistaken assumptions and understandings.” Nandy takes on the characteristics of an untrustworthy voice, lacking authenticity and moral consistency. For Vanaik, even if one were to accept Nandy’s reading of the pre-modern self as conducive to the social tolerances he advocates, this involves a recovery of tolerance in traditional ways of life. All that he offers by way of a programmatic perspective is that we look seriously at these tolerances. Does Nandy’s intellectual position really amount to anything beyond a voice directing us towards “the philosophies, theologies and symbolisms of such tolerances?” Yet again Nandy’s identity as critic is questioned this time as lacking authenticity in the sense that his position does not measure up against the scholarly discourse Vanaik has in mind. Rather Vanaik maintains that he does not investigate the historical contexts of these symbolisms and philosophies in order to build an argument around their functions and purposes. In other words, Nandy’s lack of historicity, combined with his empirical and methodological shortcomings, perpetuates an irreversible lack evident in his scholarly inadequacies in critiquing secularism, and more broadly, within his identity as critic.

In a number of places this representation of the abject as lacking authenticity is repeated. This is expressed in a variety of guises notwithstanding Nandy’s refusal to engage with modernity per se and instead opting for a regressive view of a mythical pre-

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self is diffuse is limited because of the much more static character of the world the pre-modern self
inhabits.” Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 174.
82 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 173.
83 Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 173.
modern India.\textsuperscript{86} “Anti-modernism is \textit{not} non-modern,” Vanaik affirms “and Critical Traditionality is an oxymoron.”\textsuperscript{87} Such dismissals and lack of recognition again highlight Nandy’s status and function as a phobic object and as abjection within the discourse. As abjection, he lacks the recognition of the entitled subject, a representation that reaches its limit when Vanaik declares, “his is not just a lost cause, but a non-existent one.”\textsuperscript{88} His intellectual significance reads as negligent and much is made of Nandy’s flawed credo. As he emphasises, “modernity, de-traditionalises tradition, leading defenders like Nandy to do what was never required even of traditional society’s elites – rationalizing, justifying and defending tradition!”\textsuperscript{89} But even this rationalising, justifying and defending of tradition is something that Nandy is unable to fully achieve within his work, even as the voice of anti-secularism. As Vanaik maintains, “the great irony in this defence is that Nandy displays a weaker understanding of traditionality and the past than he does of modernity and the present, even though his understanding of modernity is also deeply flawed.”\textsuperscript{90}

Nandy’s disruption and threat is advanced as he becomes representative of a “border that has encroached upon everything.”\textsuperscript{91} This includes an assumed immunity from professional criticism, a claim that Vanaik reads as further evidence of “his commitment to an authoritarian and deeply anti-democratic form of discourse.”\textsuperscript{92} Characterising Nandy as the voice of anti-modernism, anti-secularism and now an authoritarian and anti-democratic discourse reiterates the politics of blame that Vanaik adopts in the text. In invoking a persecutory logic to preserve the ontological security of the secular ideal and the Indian state, Nandy and the anti-secularists whom he represents can only be viewed as religious communitarians who have much in common with other communalists and fundamentalists. This position, in the hands of Nandy’s own peculiar modernist interpretation, “leads to a dangerous and disastrous seduction.”\textsuperscript{93} And one

\textsuperscript{86} Vanaik challenges this representation of a mythical pre-modern India when he states that, “India is neither a traditional society nor one in transition from tradition to modernity. It has long been pursuing its own form of modernity shaped by its distinctive institutional and other legacies. But these traditional legacies, of caste and religion, do not operate in traditional ways nor mean what they once did.” See Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 175.
\textsuperscript{87} Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 177.
\textsuperscript{88} Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 177.
\textsuperscript{89} Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 177.
\textsuperscript{90} Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 177.
\textsuperscript{91} For a discussion of this, see Julia Kristeva reference in Maud Ellman’s “Eliot’s Abjection,” in John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, eds. \textit{Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva}, (1990):181.
\textsuperscript{93} Achin Vanaik, \textit{Ibid.}, 180.
that is also necessarily constructed within the discourse as outside the boundaries of a “humane future.” Nandy cast as the abject figure, is threatening, ambiguous and disruptive but also amoral and inhumane. To fall under the seductions of Nandy’s anti-secularism or his siren song of anti-modernism, is for Vanaik to side with the inhumane.

4.4 The Politics of Culturalism: Nandy as the Anti-Modernist and Traditionalist

Achin Vanaik’s analysis establishes Ashis Nandy as the threatening and disruptive voice of anti-secularism and anti-modernism within the conceptual battleground of Indian secularism. Radhika Desai, writing two years later in 1999 extends this politics of blame further. For Desai the entry point into the debates on Indian secularism is to analyse the politics of culturalism that have challenged the secularity of the Indian state. Published in Economic and Political Weekly in March 20, 1999, Desai reignites the question of Ashis Nandy’s own commitment to culturalism, which takes on an even more dangerous representation in light of the political conditions she aligns these interests with, the rise of Hindu nationalism. The article titled “Culturalism and Contemporary Right, Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva” is significant for a number of reasons, notwithstanding its critique of political Hindutva, which had translated at the time into electoral victory with the formation of a Hindu nationalist Government in May 1998, albeit a Coalition Government, thus confirming as she states “the increasingly authoritarian urges of India’s ruling class.” Whilst the Hindu Right within India has since received less favourable results from voters, the presence of a proto-Hindu nationalist cultural identity or Hindu majoritarian nationalism has not disappeared from the complexities of contemporary Indian political life. A presence, which Desai, following Georg Lukacs formulation, suggests, is governed less by the internal logic of its central theses and, “more by the exigencies of the times, by the tasks it is called upon to perform at given historical moments.” This, in itself, is an interesting proposition worthy of further analysis and to which a number of theorists,

94 Vanaik’s message is clear that “those who would struggle for a humane future must reject the siren song of anti-modernism.” See Achin Vanaik, Ibid., 180. In later chapters, I revisit this question of a humane future within Nandy’s work by exploring the potentially therapeutic aspects of his approach. See Part C, Critical Interventions: Toward the Psychotherapeutic.


96 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 695.
Nandy included, have responded. However, for Desai it is Nandy’s inability to recognise this, and moreover, the role that he is called upon to perform in advancing Hindutva that needs to be addressed.

According to Desai, Nandy’s intellectual significance and indeed his complicity with these Hindutva politics is evident in the function he performs. This becomes the vantage point through which Desai explores the complexities of the intellectual, cultural and political forces that are at play in her essay. She questions the conditions for this cultural identity and of an Indianness which is cast and represented as an authentic Indian national identity and, in Hindutva’s case, is encapsulated by rigid concepts of Hinduness. The central tenant of her argument is that these culturalist discourses and the intellectual culture, at least within India, sustain them. These conditions have enabled, “the deployment of the language of particularity, of cultural nationalism constructs the basis for the authoritarian and majoritarian cultural nationalism.”

While this has already been detailed, it is the connection that this political culture has to Nandy or rather how Nandy is called upon in service of this, which is problematic. Desai acknowledges the ways in which cultural nationalism is predicated upon capitalising on the anxieties of India’s growing middle classes and ruling elite and their sense of entitlement. And like any partial identity substituting for a national one, the project Desai maintains is a hegemonic one. Such arguments concerning the logic and re-articulation of Hindutva in political life over recent years can be found in a number of scholarly works on the topic, including within Nandy’s own critique of nationalism. Again, what is interesting is that Desai does not; explore in any detail the mass appeal of the language of particularity, other than to connect this to the culturalist and dominant discourse. However, the force of Desai’s conviction lies not in her argument about the relationship between Hindutva and India’s growing bourgeoisie, but rather that the ideology is being reconstituted by these culturalist discourses in specific ways. The aims and scope of this intellectual discourse, it is claimed, must “be seen as

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97 See for instance Nandy’s own analysis of these processes in Ashis Nandy et al., Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
98 Desai states that, “the deployment of the language of particularity, of cultural nationalism, in counterfeit answer to the accelerating universalisation of capitalism which it supports and promotes is the ingenuous reality of the Right today.” Radhika Desai, “Culturalism and Contemporary Right,” (1999): 696.
part of this broader effort to change and update Hindutva” and to this extent is complicit with its political aims. While again Desai is not alone in making this connection between an intellectual positing facilitating an ideology at the political level, this takes place in her account by Nandy. Here Nandy becomes the point of condensation through which these intellectual complicities with political forces are played out. Within Desai’s characterisation, Nandy not only epitomises this contemporary culturalism or neo-Gandhian position but also represents the more “serious and systematic complicities” with “the political Hindutva” which he is “helping to build.” Nandy’s intellectual efforts are cast in service of this ideology. Such serious charges laid against Nandy enable Desai to then construct her critique around these phobic features and to re-assert the threat and danger. Nandy thus contributes to these threats of Hindutva. This characterisation of Nandy as a sympathetic voice of Hindutva and central to its internal workings marginalise and further de-authorises Nandy as critic, ensuring that a discursive field organised around a politics of blame remains in place.

The full force of this discursive mode is evident in Desai’s inability to think outside of these symptomatic responses and representations. From the outset there is a dismissal of Nandy’s own claims to oppose Hindutva, which she repudiates in the article, in favour of the complicities that he already carries forward. Desai argues that these complicities as not having escaped critical attention before, referencing Achin Vanaik’s critique of Nandy and Sarkar Sumit’s piece written five years earlier as further justification for her own argument. Desai, then, is not alone in her claims that a figure like Nandy, armed with his anti-secularism and anti-modernism, shares a conceptual space with Hindutva ideology. Yet Nandy, cast as the phobic object and as the abject, does not have a right of reply within Desai’s analysis and his voice dismissed. As the de-authorised and “not-yet-entitled-subject” Nandy’s own efforts to distinguish his work and intellectual identity from this climate of discontent ultimately only serve to strengthen Desai’s existing convictions. As she states, “Nandy’s opposition to hindutva are signals to reject elements of the received hindutva in favour of ideas which may be

more acceptable and effective components of it in the present context.”

The inability to acknowledge Nandy’s opposition demonstrates the full force of the symptomatic register through which these responses and representations are expressed. Desai’s comments exemplify the intensity of the symptomatic in safeguarding against the threat and disruption that Nandy represents in not affording him a voice, and moreover, a voice that is audible. With Desai’s commitment firmly in place, she proceeds to detail at length the ways that these complicities are revealed within Nandy’s work. This is articulated conceptually through the mutually dependent relationship between neo-Gandhianism and Hindutva, which Nandy now also represents. The article is organised around five key arguments that reinforce Nandy’s representation as a phobic object and abjection, a part in which the boundaries between the self and other disintegrate: firstly, his belonging to an intellectual culture of neo-Gandhianism that nurtures this symbiotic relationship; secondly, Nandy’s dubious academic and intellectual credentials; thirdly, a more detailed discussion of Nandy’s particular broad contemporary culturalism; fourthly, a critique of Nandy’s style and the methodology which finally culminates with a characterisation of Nandy as an irreverent and irrelevant figure; and finally Nandy at his most phobic. What is interesting about these arguments is the way that Desai, having established her conclusion, constructs a distinctive chain of association regarding Nandy’s phobic features, primarily organised around his intellectual commitment to neo-Gandhian thought.

Similar to Vanaik’s criticisms, there is for Desai a collapse between post-modern comments and this culturalism and neo-Gandhian thought. Not much is offered by way of definition of this intellectual current, nor does Desai distinguish between neo-Gandhian thought and neo-Gandhianism, arguably an important point of differentiation worthy of further elaboration. Rather, such markers of difference are overlooked in favour of her more general assertions that these discourses are becoming increasingly and disturbingly the breeding grounds for the proliferation of Hindutva ideology. In representing neo-Gandhianism as a mainstream intellectual position, intellectually fashionable and therefore current, she is able to establish the immediate and widespread threat that this presents. The danger and fear is present when she argues that neo-Gandhianism’s nativism lends itself to the contemporary political purposes of the Right.

and that the impetus for this connection comes from its anti-modernist foundation. Like Vanaik, Desai builds upon a pre-existing chain of signification grounded within a persecutory logic. There is a re-staging of a series of threatening signifiers, namely that the intellectual neo-Gandhian position is, by definition, profoundly anti-secular and, in turn, anti-modern in orientation.

While Gandhi’s critique of western modernity is well documented, Desai does not engage with the details and particularities of this critique but rather capitalises on a particular representation of Gandhi to make her point. Having invoked this existing phobic threat, clearly anti-modern and anti-secular, she then suggests that Nandy’s own neo-Gandhianism establishes an even more disruptive version of this threat with his own contemporary bourgeois formulation, bringing a past threat now into the present. Arguably, the phobic object is firmly fixed in place within the discourse: firstly with this revival of neo-Gandhianism; and secondly, via Nandy, who now offers another version or reincarnation of this existing fear. Nandy along with Gandhi are cast as the bad subject, or even non-subject as his subjectivity and significance is dismissed and not afforded recognition. She questions the validity of this representation of Gandhian thought and the people, in this case Nandy, who uncritically support it. Desai continues to build upon her aversion towards this intellectual current by maintaining that his institutional setting further deepens Nandy’s threatening complicities. She suggests that the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), where Nandy has been based for the last thirty-five or so years, has, since its inception by the late Rajni Kothari in the mid 1960’s, “continued to follow the scholarly fashion of the times – from modernization to suitably de-Marxified versions of dependency in the 1970s to the present Gandhian focus on poverty and social movements (with a preoccupation with the cultural)…”

The phobic object, Ashis Nandy (with the exception of Rajni Kothari who is only mentioned in passing) colonises CSDS, as it were, at the expense of the numerous influential scholars, intellectuals and activists who also emanate from its intellectual and cultural hub. The phobic signifier that determines Nandy’s discursive identity carries with it the additional burden of the whole intellectual culture of the institution. The persecutory logic and defensive chain of association within Desai’s article grows from (a) the connection between culturalist discourses and the contemporary politics of the

104 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 699.
Right to (b) neo-Gandhianism and Ashis Nandy as its main exponent to (c) being complicit with the reformist agenda of Hindutva ideology to now (d) being supported by a prestigious institution, CSDS within Indian intellectual culture which feeds back into (a) in an enclosed circuit of logic. Desai, therefore, presents a rather self-contained reading or rather a symptomatic one that faithfully works at keeping these anxieties at bay.

However, Desai’s critique remains organised around what she defines as Nandy’s own brand of irrationalised elite culturalism. This brand serves to re-work neo-Gandhianism and, in turn, contemporary expressions of Hindutva. A project she interprets in the following way, “Nandy’s version of neo-Gandhianism claims to be more genuinely emancipatory than the west’s rationalist and materialist enlightenment discourse, but it is actually an all too fashionable, and by now familiar opposition to the Left, liberalism and reason itself.”105 Desai, therefore, constructs her argument around the double threat of Nandy’s version of neo-Gandhianism that is undermined and dismissed as a purely oppositional mode. Here she presents Nandy’s position of critical traditionalism as a discourse of emancipation used within his work to replace western enlightenment rationalism. Set up within this antithesis, namely in opposition to reason itself, Desai can neither see the “distinctive rationality that critical traditionalism is supposed to embody,” nor see beyond “these broad generically cultural nationalist arguments.”106 Furthermore, Nandy’s conception of tradition, culture or civilisation “is an elite and conservative [one], and in the case of India, a brahminical one.”107 These representations enable Desai to project her phobia, at least in intellectual terms, against the irrationalism of Nandy’s argument. She states, “this core of irrationalism which has shrugged off the yoke of any (indigenous, authentic, traditional or any other) rationality which call it to account, precluding any rational discursive engagement on the grounds of reasons definitional in authenticity and alienness, imparts to Nandy’s discourse a profound potential for authoritarianism.”108

Such charges of elitism, irrationality and authoritarianism, in addition to Nandy’s political alliances with Hindutva, offer very little exegesis or serious engagement with that by which Desai is so threatened. The persecutory logic within which her critique is

105 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 700.
106 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 700.
107 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 700.
108 Radhika Desai, Ibid., 700.
organised does, nonetheless, give her license to continue her attack on Nandy’s mode of address as well as his dissenting position. This mode, which is characterised within generalised terms, reads in the following way: given that all domination is modern and tradition is, in Nandy’s view, progressive by definition, tradition, therefore, is where the “badge of his radicalism” is to be found.\textsuperscript{109} The formulation, despite its simplicity, misrepresents or rather does not allow recognition of both the significance of critical traditionalism as a conceptual mode of dissent and Nandy’s intellectual commitment to what elsewhere has been described as dissenting modes of dissent within his work.\textsuperscript{110} Nandy, again, becomes a threatening disruption to the understood borders of identification and accepted modes of critique: and where the complexities of the arguments identified are over-determined by these modes of representation already established. For example she states: “Nandy’s self-professed brand of critical traditionalism, is nothing less than the dark secret of all reactionary authoritarian ideologies, unaccountable power with a totalist scope.”\textsuperscript{111} Desai’s characterisation, therefore, works to undermine the radical potential of Nandy’s position by invoking a generalised association with other similar reactionary and authoritarian ideologies. This is Nandy at his most phobic and threatening, as a disruptive force, as abjection that is both totalist in scope and accompanied by an unaccountable power. It is this authoritarian mode underpinning Nandy’s work that assures the reader of his commitment to the ideology of culturalism. Within these terms, Nandy’s dissent serves “the right-wing purposes of majoritarian cultural assertion which needs to appear oppositional.”\textsuperscript{112}

The significance of Nandy’s intellectual contributions are further questioned by maintaining that there is no serious interrogation of his work, especially within the “unfortunate standard universities of the English-speaking world” where she argues Nandy’s claims to progressiveness are most successful.\textsuperscript{113} Commenting on his reputation in the West, Desai attributes this recognition to the “great deal of heaving

\textsuperscript{109} Radhika Desai, \textit{Ibid.}, 701.
\textsuperscript{110} Nandy, in a number of places within his work, outlines this commitment to challenging established modes of defiance. For example, see “Introduction” in Ashis Nandy, \textit{Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness}, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{112} She situates Nandy as part of a Manichean opposition between “tradition” and “modernity,” the one uniformly humane and benign, the other irredeemably oppressive. Radhika Desai, \textit{Ibid.}, 706.
\textsuperscript{113} Radhika Desai, \textit{Ibid.}, 701.
from the self-promoting Nandy himself.”\(^{114}\) Although not elaborating on how this is achieved, Desai accounts for Nandy’s popularity as a combination of his being fashionable within the West and the profound ignorance that still exists about India, even by scholars who should know better. His devotees, we are told, persist in attempting to place Nandy in the wider framework of contemporary Western academic culturalist discourse. Desai has already clearly established this discourse as a threatening and disruptive international intellectual trend. However, within India and via the voice of Nandy, whose intellectual integrity and scholarly credentials are found wanting, this disruption becomes all the more acute. “After all,” she asks, “how many scholars could take one who claims to be ‘making myths’ as seriously as a peer?”\(^{115}\) Establishing herself as the entitled subject, the “phobic object”, in contrast, is not granted the status of a peer. His scholarly methods are caricatured as “casual hearsay” derived from “after-dinner conversation over drinks,” while his writing we are told, “[Is] intellectually undemanding prose with indulgent rhetorical flourishes, in which assertion takes the place of argument, and the convenience of the moment, of accuracy.”\(^{116}\)

There are further claims against Nandy’s intellectual integrity when she suggests that his work represents instances of fashionable transcendence of social science. Here the phobic object hides behind these fashionable instances in order to conceal his intellectual opacity and ambiguity. However, for Desai, this is a means by which he evades responsibility for the views he expresses. This view reinforces Nandy’s status as that which threatens the boundaries of debate, given that “Nandy’s views encourage a religious majoritarianism exactly like the BJP’s call for Hindu assertion.”\(^{117}\) Here the message is clear; the phobic object is not simply an intellectual threat but is reconstituted now as a very real and dangerous political disruption to the modern Indian secular nation state. As a moment of abjection, Nandy’s anti-secularism provides not only an ontological threat to the secular subject (secular account of self) but now

“licenses the ‘religious’ sources of majoritarian Hindutva’s content.”118 Nandy, as Desai maintains, continues to perform a number of functions for Hindutva, notwithstanding his contribution to a construction of a normative pan-Hindu Indian identity and subjectivity. As the phobic object and the abject, Nandy constructs a Hindu, brahminical and irrational identity for India’s bourgeois ruling class and in doing so works to define these modes of authority within the subject and within the nation state. Desai maintains that, “in doing so he reconfigures this bourgeoisie’s boundaries.”119 This also reveals Nandy’s broader commitment, which Desai describes in the following way, and in so doing resists psychoanalytical approaches and more specifically, methods. She states, “practically all of Nandy’s psychologistic writing – whether it purports to be about science or terrorism – is actually about the kind of self his bourgeois audience should have (which is why he sounds so much like another Indian guru, selling his own brand of Karma-Cola).”120 Nandy’s phobic features align him with the branded and commercialised features of yet another Indian guru. Yet this guru in selling his Karma Cola is deprived of intellectual recognition, whereby his significance and saliency is replaced by the anxieties that his identity, even as a guru, raises. The main point is that a theorist like Ashis Nandy, whether expressed within his anti-intellectualism, his anti-secularism, his culturalism and neo-Gandhianism or his guru-like status, can only continue to perpetuate these anxieties, which Desai’s analysis attempts to keep at bay. Nandy, and the form of culturalism which he represents, cannot be afforded an intellectual recognition that would warrant a serious consideration or engagement with this position. Nor do Nandy’s arguments, ideas and methods warrant any serious engagement. Desai’s warnings continue unabated: “Thus owning a certain type of dissent and disowning another, India can be made sage for participatory (cadre and lumpen mobilizing) traditional (brahminical and irrationalist) cultural (religious, anti-secular) democratic (majoritarian) politics suited to India’s chaotic political reality.”121 Nandy is thus made over through all the phobic features that Desai’s symptomatic response can provide him with, within this reading of the politics of blame. Furthermore, his brahminical, irrationalist, religious and anti-secular position does little to address India’s chaotic political reality, which she vigorously condemns and of which she is fearful. Within this persecutory logic Nandy is constituted as a figure of

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abjection; the one who incites and perpetuates fear, loathing, chaos and disruption in the wake of his dangerous culturalist complicities.

In these two examples of critics’ responses and representations of Nandy, provided by Achin Vanaik and Radhika Desai, the intensity of the fascination and horror that Nandy generates is captured. In Vanaik’s work, Nandy functions as the point of condensation through which the conceptual battleground of Indian secularism is played out. Where Vanaik’s defence of secularism establishes a series of symptomatic responses, Desai continues to repeat a number of these in re-affirming a politics of blame, by detailing the ways in which Nandy’s brand of culturalism and indigenism as an intellectual enterprise is complicit with the politics of Hindu nationalism. Nandy’s intellectual identity and intellectual significance represent a threatening disruption to established norms, assumptions, values, and identities. In order to negate the validity of Nandy’s contributions to these debates, negate his subjectivity, and de-authorise him as critic of the state, Vanaik and Desai, cast Nandy as the abject figure. As that which threatens and disrupts borders (including the borders of rational and irrational dissent) and therefore, lacks intellectual and moral integrity.

While these responses and representations are articulated within the register of the symptomatic, there are also distinct limits to the level of engagement possible with Nandy’s arguments, ideas and methods. These processes of making over Nandy’s identity as critic as the phobic object and abjection are repeated in multiple fora outside of these academic debates. In turning to a discussion of a public exchange carried out in 2004 between Nandy and a number of theorists, the ways in which these symptomatic responses take form, and are repeated as a feature of debating Indian secularism, are demonstrated. I also explore the recent attempts in 2008 by the Nareendra Modi Government of Gujarat to criminalise Nandy’s identity. This repetition and re-iteration of a persecutory logic continues to take over and moreover, make over Nandy’s identity as critic of the state in over-determined ways. These responses and representations limit the engagement with Nandy’s arguments, ideas and methods, and it is Nandy’s overriding threat and disruption that is responded to. In doing so, the established boundaries defining dissent and debate remain fiercely protected by the symptom, that
is “entrusted with representing important interests,” and which continues to do so through acquiring “a value for self-assertion.”

Chapter 5:
A Colonial Thinker:
Re-staging the Logic of Critique in Public Debates

In the 1990s within the academic debates on Indian secularism particular representations of Nandy emerge. I have argued that these representations are underpinned by a persecutory logic where Nandy as critic of the state functions as a point of condensation for a number of fears and anxieties. Nandy’s identity becomes made over as the threatening embodiment of culturalism, and spearheading an anti-secular intellectual tradition in India. These threats that he carries forward into the debates on secularism are expressed in a variety of guises. For instance, Nandy becomes the irreverent provocative critic of the secular state whose abject status precludes him from authenticity, integrity and any moral consistency. Nandy’s arguments and ideas are at best overlooked and at worse undermined and dismissed as the provocative intellectual. More importantly Nandy’s method and psychoanalytic approach that underpins his questioning of the cultural and psychological viability of secularism is overlooked. The more damaging representations involve his alleged intellectual complicity and support for the political imperatives of Hindutva ideology, or pan-Hindu nationalism. Despite his criticisms of Hindu Nationalism, Nandy’s confronting anti-secular position aligns him with a culturalism that shares a conceptual space with the Hindu Right, at least for Vanaik and Desai. This threat in Desai’s case is taken further who argues that Nandy’s intellectual efforts must be understood as political attempts to update Hindutva. Nandy’s intellectual significance is case in threatening and disruptive terms as the leading contemporary intellectual in India reforming Hindutva.

Nandy takes on the characteristics of an object of fear and loathing, functioning in the psychoanalytic sense as a phobic object. Consistent with the features of a phobic object, Nandy becomes a substitute formation for deeper and more complex fears and threats, connected to question of national identity, national integration and Indianness. Nandy’s own critique of the secular ideal in which these issues are confronted, produces a confronting reflexivity that can disarm critics. Further, it forecloses the capacity for critique and debate, as it is Nandy’s perceived threat that is engaged with. I have also argued that in addition to Nandy functioning like the phobic object in representations of
him in these debates, he is marked with an even more disruptive quality. Here Kristeva’s concept of the abject and abjection adds to our understanding of Nandy’s capacity to disrupt. The abject and abjection are concepts that for Kristeva draws our attention to the borders between subject and object, to that which must be abjected from view in the formation of subjectivity. Thus the abject is an affective state of fascination and horror that both lures and repels. Nandy takes on the characteristics of that which fascinates and repels. The anxiety that exists within this intellectual culture around Nandy’s identity becomes personalised, as he threatens to disrupt the boundaries of politics and internal processes of individual and collective identification. As someone who questions the secular ideal and the ways that this ideal defines Indianness, he represents a threat to an existing system of organisation, including existing norms, meanings and identities. Nandy’s abject status in these debates thus marks him as a threat to subjectivity, to the boundaries of selfhood. Further, his challenging of the secular ideal is experienced as a potential and real fear of loss of self. He represents and carries forward into the debates on secularism the disruption of the abject; that is the disruption to establishing meanings, identities and relations. As that representative of the abject he radically disrupts the boundaries between the secular and non-secular, the public and private and self and other.

This politics of blame characteristic of these academic responses to Nandy and his work is repeated in contemporary public debates on Indian secularism. In this chapter I explore two examples from public debates that typify this persecutory logic. The first example is a debate carried out in 2004 in a popular Indian weekly journal and Indian newspaper, the second being more recent attempts in 2008 to criminalise Nandy’s identity in response to the threat that Nandy as critic of the state represents. In the first example, the participants in this exchange, Kuldip Nayar, Ashis Nandy, Sanjay Subramanyam and Amit Chaudhuri move the debate outside of academic circles into a public discussion. The other interesting feature of this exchange is that Nandy enters into this public discussion by providing a response to one of his critics, the Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar. Nandy’s reply to critics is considered in greater detail in the following chapter, but this reply also performs a significant role within the exchange. In attempting to clarify his position Nandy’s arguments and counter-arguments are met with a curious suspicion and afforded a symptomatic recognition. Yet part of this telling resistance to his work, and the responses which follow, suggest that at least within this
discursive exchange he can be nothing other than a phobic object and the threatening voice of abjection. Any attempts made by Nandy to clarify his position are displaced by the anxieties that they raise. For he remains a threat within the exchange as someone who carries forward within his work and identity the potential to disintegrate self/other relations, including the boundaries of debate. This moment thus reaffirms Nandy’s abject status in the debates, and like the abject he becomes “…the symptom of the being on the border, pushing toward psychosis where the ‘I’ blurs and is not yet.”\(^1\) In attempting to marginalise and de-authorise Nandy as critic, it is Nandy’s overwhelming threat of disruption that is defended against. The reoccurrence of the politics of blame within this public forum emphasises the ways in which the terms of engagement and the possibility of dissent, are ultimately at the mercy of the logic, which structures the symptom.

The second example I consider is the way that Nandy as representative of the potential and real threat of abjection carries forward a disruption and destruction not only of processes of identification, but of meaning itself. Kristeva argues that the destruction of the symbolic is, “something able to drive us into delirious states, violence and turmoil of thinking.”\(^2\) This turmoil plays out in attempts in May 2008 to make over Nandy as a criminal. The criminal charges were laid by the Nareendra Modi State Government of Gujarat against Nandy for an article he wrote in *The Times of India* on the 8\(^{th}\) January 2008. The article titled “Gujarat: Blame the Middle classes” critiques the ways in which political culture in Gujarat has changed, particular under the leadership of Nareendra Modi. It is alleged that these comments warrant the charges laid against Nandy for inciting communal tensions and violence. Although the charges were dismissed the incident demonstrates the full extent of the threat and disruption that Nandy as critic of the state represents.

5.1 Reading the Public Exchange: Re-igniting an Existing Logic of Critique

Writing in a widely distributed Indian weekly journal titled *Outlook Magazine* on 31 May 2004, Kuldip Nayar re-opens the debate over Ashis Nandy’s contributions to analysing Indian Secularism. The article titled, “Abhor Singularity! The critique of secularism by Nandy et al confuses tradition with religion,” reignites an existing logic

in question the significance of his efforts, given that as the title denotes he confuses
tradition with religion. Nayar begins the article by recounting a recent meeting with
Nandy where he asked him whether his own understanding of Nandy’s position on
secularism is correct. This being for Nayar that Nandy did not believe secularism was
suited “to the genius of India.” Nayar reports that Nandy responded, that, “you are
more or less correct.” Nayar uses this exchange as the basis for revealing the flaw in
Nandy’s position, namely that Nandy has lost faith in the pluralistic ethos of the
country. Nayar equates secularism here with preserving the pluralistic ethos of Indian
society and moreover Indian political culture. He argues that Nandy doubts whether
secularism can preserve national integration and in turn, foster pluralism. While this
doubt may be worth exploring in Nayar’s analysis this possibility is closed off. In
Nayar’s account Nandy conflates tradition and religion and “mock[s] at the synthesis of
the country has managed over the years.” Nayar’s objection arises when tradition is
equated with Hinduism, or in its ideologically charged manifestation Hindutva.
Traditions for Nayar do not equate to religion, and Nandy’s opaqueness in clarifying
these issues leaves him open to a series of further criticisms.

Nayar invokes a particular chain of association or signification already discussed.
Namely that Nandy’s reading of tradition, which draws on the pluralism inherent within
the cultural and religious traditions of the Indic civilisation, are too closely aligned with
the political demands of the Hindu Right. The phobic object yet again stirs up the
question of identity and its public representations. Nayar argues that “our tradition” if
one can even speak of a universal Indian-ness, “is that of accommodating different
religions and separate faiths,” of which “secularism is a product of that process.”
Tolerance and what he terms “the spirit of accommodation” is attributable less with the
internal workings of traditions and more with the ideological and ontological security
found within Indian Secularism. What intellectuals like Nandy then fail to realise,
Nayar argues, is that like proponents of Hindutva “they are making Secularism look
anti-Hindu and are equating it with minorityism.”

The politics of blame come to the fore in suggesting that Nandy misrecognise’s
the Hindutva position, and even more dangerously does not recognise that which he

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4 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 1.
5 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 1.
6 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 1.
7 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 1.

might have in common with them. Behind such concerns is Nayar’s characterisation of the debate of Indian secularism as a fight between secularism and chauvinism; a debate that he tells us is nothing new. For there are distinct continuities in this current debate with what has preceded before. Nayar draws on this historical connection by arguing that Nandy is a figure whose work has much in common with the communalism of the mid nineteen seventies. The further assumption is that this wave of communalism during this time also provided the conditions, which led to the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi. In remembering Gandhi’s assassination as “saving the nation from the hot wind of communalism” he stages the victory of official political secularism in the battle against communal forces. Nayar adds to the list of Nandy’s threatening features by noting his complicity with these communal forces. Nandy thus is also attributed with carrying forward these uncanny fears and memories from the mid nineteen seventies. Nandy’s phobic status therefore invokes a present threat but also the possible return of an earlier fear and the psychic conditions accompanying these experiences. Nayar warns that, “What is now accepted as the lure of cultural or traditional impulses was then considered an expression of communalism. But such confusion can’t be an excuse for righting a wrong. It only shows that intellectuals like Nandy are faltering in their commitment.” Nayar re-ignites public debate over Indian secularism by bringing Nandy back into the frame as a proponent of anti-secular and anti-modern strands of thought, and as sharing conceptual space with communalism. Nandy’s emphasis on inherited cultural and traditional impulses as the way in which Indian communal amity can be achieved, is something that, for Nayar, must be received with caution.

5.2 Exploring the Right of Reply: Can it be Heard?

Ashis Nandy’s response to Nayar’s article attempts to expose a particular logic operating in the debates on secularism. Nandy’s response titled “A Billion Gandhi’s” and published in the same journal on June 21st makes the point that, “down the ages, a natural tolerance- tinged with faith- has been our subsoil. Why do my friends foist a dry import like secularism upon this rooted ness?” Nandy’s opening comment makes two key points. Firstly, it re-establishes his position with respect to secularism, as a dry

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6 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 2.
7 Kuldip Nayar, Ibid., 2.
imported concept. For Nandy, the importation of official secularism forecloses tolerance and amity, which exist within Indian culture and life. Secondly, Nandy challenges the boundaries of secularism, when he calls for a return to “a natural tolerance – tinged with faith,” suggesting that there are alternative modes of toleration already present in Indian culture. In the body of the article he explains why it is that his work has forced him to confront these aspects of Indian political culture. Nandy challenges an existing system of meaning, of order and in articulating ambivalence this brings him in direct confrontation with that which has been cast away. In doing so his work also raises important questions about the value of dissent and which voices are deemed acceptable. Is secularism the only form of communal amity Nandy asks? Is it in other words, the final arbiter on the question of tolerance in Indian society and politics? Nayar who has equated Nandy’s challenge with communalism and specific historical expressions of Gandhianism misunderstands these questions. For Nayar these views have already been rejected by the psychic organization underpinning his critique. Nandy nonetheless continues his lone battle and again attempts to clarify his position: “actually, my criticism of Secularism is an aggressive reaffirmation of these proto-Gandhian traditions and a search for post-secular forms of politics more in touch with the needs of a democratic polity in South Asia.”

Although Nandy is commenting on the relationship between national integration, tolerance and democracy, the threat of the abject is already evident here. Nandy’s position is located within and sustained by proto-Gandhian traditions. This proto-Gandhianism is part of a search for post-secular forms of politics. The tolerance Nandy has in mind clearly is outside of the established Indian secular ideal. He notes that inter-religious strife; riots and pogroms take place within urbanised and industrialised areas rather than within villages and rural areas. From this he deduces that Nandy reads within the Indian village a form of tolerance that continues to endure and prosper outside of these prescribed official modes of tolerance enforced by the Indian polity. As he elaborates, “To go to an Indian village to teach tolerance through secularism is a form of obscene arrogance to which I do not want to be a party.”

12 Nandy’s concept of what he terms is a post-secular awareness is explored in the following chapter. See Chapter 6: Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics.
13 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 1.
Whereas his critics have positioned Nandy with communalism and proto-Gandhian traditions, Nandy locates his argument in the tolerance manifest in ordinary people and everyday life. These traditions tinged with popular religious beliefs are within secular accounts constructed as a threatening disruption. Some critics may view Nandy’s concept of tolerance as indigenous, but it is also a call for the recognition of alternative concepts of tolerance that exist within Indian society. For Nandy, “the time has come for us to decipher the language and culture of those humble Indians who live by their inferior beliefs and have made our society liveable.” At stake are not only whether official secularism should be abandoned but also whether secularism as the dominant ideology occludes and represses other expressions of tolerance. Nandy’s invitation is a call to confront that, which has been cast away, that which has been abducted from politics but which lingers like the unconscious within society and within political culture. He asks, “If secularism only means the traditional tolerance of South Asia, why do we need an imported idea to talk about that local tolerance?” Nandy again raises the confronting point regarding the inheritance of the secular ideal from western political theory and questions its dominant status. The confronting proposition challenges the status quo and the accepted boundaries of Indian secularism. Nandy recognises that his approach is radically confronting. He is reconciled that his discursive representation is over-determined by the symptomatic responses already present. He concedes that, “I also know that it is pointless to raise these questions. Some things are just not possible in the dominant, colonial culture of India’s knowledge industry and among our official dissenters.”

Nandy recognises and comments upon the limits of the debate, including the limits that underpin official dissent. What of course is not possible is the recognition of Nandy’s rationale for his confrontation and contributions outside of these prescribed modes of reception and representation. The dominant signifier of the colonial culture of India’s knowledge industry takes over and Nandy’s own reflexivity disappears from view. The question of India’s official dissenters brings us back to the constituting boundaries governing the terms of engagement; between the insider and outsider; that is who constitutes official and legitimate forms of dissent. Articulated within these terms

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16 Nandy continues here that, “otherwise, at least the Indian Left would have picked up a thing or two from the aggressively non-secular, liberation-theology-based ideology of the Sandinistas. See Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 2.
the insider or official dissenter receives the benefits not only of the entitled speaking subject, whose voice is heard and engaged with, and whose identity and subjectivity is assured. In contrast the voice of the outsider remains disruptive and threatening and it is the insecurity of the not yet entitled subject that is assured. It follows that the outsider’s voice is cast as undermining the integrity of the nation.

However, what is significant about Nandy’s contribution to this exchange is that it provides an interruption to the persecutory logic operating. Nandy interrupts this logic by conceding his own discomfort with his work. He also recognises that his position is unlikely to be heard and is possibly even unable to be heard. He states that, “it has taken me many years to turn a traitor to my class – the urban, western-educated, modern Indians – and to learn to respect the people who have sustained Indian democracy using their tacit theories and principles of communal amity.”

Is Nandy aware of his own abjection when recognising and publicly acknowledging himself as a traitor? For as Sarah Bearsworth argues, “abjection, then captures a condition of the subject that is sent to its boundaries, where there is, as such, neither subject nor object, only the abject.” While Nandy is cast as the abject he maintains that he is a non-believer and a child of modern India. His confrontation with modern Indian secularism reveals a confrontation within his own self. During the last twenty years he claims to have been forced to confront the boundaries of his modern self and into this disruptive mode to address his dissolution with secularism. Nandy’s intellectual commitment is forced to confront a dominant feature of this modern self, described by Gandhi, that those who think that religion has nothing to do with politics understand neither religion nor politics. Or read through a psychoanalytic frame it acknowledges that that those who think the “return of the repressed” can simply be further repressed or displaced, neither understand conscious or unconscious life. Nandy’s commitment provides his critics with ample ammunition to re-affirm the secular ideal. In this process his views do not acquire the status of “official” dissent but remain phobic and a threatening disruption. This

18 This question is addressed in the later parts of the dissertation when I characterise the methods that he adopts to generate social and political criticism. See *Chapters 6 and 7* where I characterise the psychoanalytic mode operating in his work and in his identity as critic. *Chapter 6, Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics. Chapter 7, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention.*
reaffirms the logic of the debate whereby, “anyone who dares challenge this supreme value is classified as a naïve conservative, a Hindu communalist or worse.”

5.3 Re-asserting the Boundaries of Debate

Nandy’s interruption in the exchange gives way to a damning rejoinder from Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a Professor of Indian History and Culture at Oxford University, who attempts to re-assert the defensive boundaries of critique. The article titled “Our Only Colonial Thinker: Ashis Nandy’s foundational assumptions on secularism are flawed, uniformed” published less than a month later in Outlook Magazine on July 5, 2004, exemplifies the anxiety that Nandy provokes. The article can be read as a forceful reassertion of the modern secular self, one which is validated by Subrahmanyam’s intellectual integrity, in contrast to Nandy’s “maverick thinker” who is “tiresomely repetitive and profoundly ill-informed.” Subrahmanyam acknowledges Nandy’s status as a widely “celebrated” and “great thinker,” though radically questions these accolades along with Nandy’s intellectual credentials and credibility. Is he really worthy of such accolades, or rather can he even be recognised in these terms we might ask within the register of the symptomatic? In re-asserting the already established terms of exchange Subrahmanyam argues that Nandy’s reading of secularism, as primarily a European import is fundamentally an untrustworthy formulation. For Subrahmanyam, Nandy’s untrustworthy claim is symptomatic of a more general intellectual and moral untrustworthiness. For, “Nandy’s Europe does not exist except in his own imagination. It is a non-place that only exists to be an anti-India and he believes he can attribute anything he wants to it just because it tickles his fancy.” Such comments work to reinforce an image of Nandy as a discredited scholar who is intellectually manipulative in order to satisfy a personal whim. From such a vantage point Subrahmanyam is able to differentiate and distance himself from Nandy’s anti-intellectualism and scholarly irreverence.

As part of Subrahmanyam’s defence of Indian secularism he argues the concept has more resonance in India than it does in the West. He continues that secularism carries a very different political weight within the India that he is referencing. Within

22 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ibid., 1.
the political imaginary that he is interested in protecting and defending, in contrast to Nandy’s, secularism “has acquired a deep meaning and significance in India that many Europeans simply don’t understand.”

Subrahmanyam represents Nandy as an untrustworthy contributor to the debates because he fails to acknowledge a fundamental historical reality. In not affording Indian secularism the intellectual and political acknowledgement it deserves Nandy remains a peripheral voice. Nandy can only be a peripheral voice given his illiteracy in the historical reality Subrahmanyam defends. He is even willing to concede that Nandy’s call for traditions and religious concepts of tolerance that have their own long history in India, is indeed a task worth pursuing. Nandy falls short of achieving this task because he is not a credible intellectual source. The phobic object now lacks the scholarly standards needed for reputable research and argumentation. Indeed Subrahmanyam’s advice to Nandy is clear as the following excerpt illustrates.

So perhaps Nandy should begin by reflecting on the rather widespread forms of obscene arrogance and not hand out lessons before doing his homework. If he does so, I am sure he will find plenty of examples of tolerance not just in villages that his rather tired populist rhetoric wants to hold up as an example, but in other parts of Indian society in both the past and present. But it may involve harder work than producing the cotton candy that passes for cleverness in indigenist circles.

Aside from the profound attack on Nandy’s scholastic methods, his obscene arrogance amongst other phobic features, Subrahmanyam again invokes the threat of a return to pre-modern concepts of indigeneity and culturalism. Therefore, for Subrahmanyam Ashis Nandy becomes made over as a true colonial thinker, as evidenced by his arrogant and authoritarian voice. Subrahmanyam regards Nandy as nothing more than a provocateur or peripheral dissenter who is trapped in an image of India that has since long past. He can be located with a “lachrymose tradition of the romantic underside of the so-called Bengal Renaissance.” In aligning Nandy with this intellectual movement Subrahmanyam suggests that he embodies the romanticism of

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this movement. This is further supported by the intellectual credentials that he has, notably as a colonial thinker, and representative of a dangerous culturalism. Indeed if one is to continue with the claim that Nandy is deserving of the accolade of being a great thinker then it can only be within the boundaries of these limited intellectual spaces. This reading keeps Nandy outside of debate as Subrahmanyan leaves us questioning the intellectual integrity of the phobic object.

5.4 Dissent as a Question of Possibility and Audibility

Amit Chaudhuri reignites the exchange between Nayar, Nandy and Subrahmanyan by questioning the conditions and boundaries of this exchange. In “Distant Thunder” published in Outlook Magazine on August 2, 2004 Chaudhuri begins by stating, “Back in Calcutta after a month in England, I found that a debate or a public difference of opinion, between two Indian academics had gone all but stale.” He questions why this exchange has come to a halt, and suggests that this may have more to do with the dissemination of ideas rather than the saliency of the exchange. Chaudhuri argues that, “there is still no highbrow journal of ideas in our country that could claim to have a decent nationwide circulation.” Focusing on the question of circulation allows him to explore the ways in which ideas are disseminated through publishing channels, though dissemination also denotes the ways in which these ideas are communicated. Hence, his questioning of whether the public exchange thus far might even be conceived as a debate. Chaudhuri’s own interpretation leads him to conclude that, “debate perhaps it is not the right word.” He characterises the exchange as it has publicly unfolded as a peculiar occurrence, noting that, “I was struck by this business; public airings by academics in India are rare.” However, while this may be rare he argues the parameters through which the exchange has unfolded including the logic of argumentation invoked is worthy of consideration. Chaudhuri characterises the discursive field, through which this exchange on secularism has been carried out by noting that, “all in all, you conclude that in the circles I’m referring to, there has been

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26 This article originally appeared in two parts, Part I under the title of “Distant Thunder” on 2 July 2004 and Part II under the title “A Climate of Opinion,” on 1 August 2004 in The Telegraph of Calcutta. These pieces were republished as one article under Amit Chaudhuri, “Distant Thunder” Outlook, (2 August 2004) and it is this version that is referenced here. See Amit Chauduri, “Distant Thunder” Outlook, (2 August 2004): 1.
27 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 1.
28 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 1.
29 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 1.
relatively little scope for the genuine debate, criticism and irreverence in the last two
decades; the interesting and even important intellectual developments have been swiftly
translated into territorial anxieties.”

Chaudhuri interrupts this politics of blame by questioning the constitutive features
of the debate, the limits and limitations of this logic. In other words to what extent is
genuine debate even possible given the territorial anxieties which Chaudhuri claims are
at play. At what point have important intellectual developments been condensed into
territorial anxieties? In light of this malaise Chaudhuri welcomes theorists like
Subrahmanyam, whose intervention “is both welcome and overdue.” For like Nandy’s
contribution “it creates a break, a rupture in our monotonous observance of intellectual
propriety.” Yet ultimately he argues that Subrahmanyam falls prey to the discursive
logic at play, succumbing to the force of these territorial anxieties. For Chaudhuri,
Subrahmanyam is unable to break away from the symptomatic for it is only through a
framework of a politics of blame that Nandy’s work and his intellectual identity can be
understood. Although this is an issue, which extends beyond Subrahmanyam’s article,
he does repeat and exacerbate these representations in intensified ways. Subrahmanyam’s
response though cannot be singled out on this basis, but is part and parcel of the symptomatic
underpinning this exchange and the debates on Indian Secularism more broadly. Chaudhuri concludes, “that in the end, it seemed to reaffirm the difficulties of critical language and thinking, and the unique elusiveness of Nandy in our cultural landscape.”

The territorial anxiety which Nandy produces even for an intellectual of
Subrahmanyam’s calibre and indeed working in a very different institutional, political
and intellectual setting also gives way here to a deeper anxiety regarding the idiom of
Nandy’s critique. Chaudhuri rightly connects this to the larger issue of the possibility
and audibility of dissent, that is to say the parameters which constitute a recognizable
critical language. That there is an elusive quality to Nandy’s intellectual identity and
significance, or even an ambiguity, has thus far been represented as threatening and

30 Chandhuri elaborates further here stating that, “this is partly because the liberal intelligentsia in India
has become, one suspects, such a complex orchestration, in the last twenty years, of hierarchies and
affiliations, of publications, papers, conferences, university chairs, committee appointments – an
orchestra playing a limited number of tunes, or limited variations on one tune – that to disturb your
precise relationship to this arrangement is to pass into silence, or intellectual non-existence.” See Amit
Chauduri, Ibid., 1.

31 Amit Chauduri, Ibid., 1.

32 Amit Chauduri, Ibid., 2.
disruptive. For a theorist like Subrahmanyam this threat and disruption is contained through the symptomatic. This for instance, plays out in terms of Nandy’s ill-informed historical inaccurate reading. In response to this, Subrahmanyam’s corrective voice reclaims the concept of secularism as authentically Indian and as central to the politics he defends. Such representations leave him to assert that Nandy as a consequence is ignorant, an innocent, and questioning the rationality underpinning his mode of argumentation. Chaudhuri continues to offer a characterisation of Subrahmanyam’s own logic that on the surface seems befitting of an established intellectual tradition, “of polemical debunking: an enfant terrible attacking an older, establishment figure.”

Chaudhuri claims however, that Subrahmanyam achieves the trustworthy and hence authoritative presence by the end of the article. This presence works to overshadow the ignorance, innocence and disruption of the phobic object and leads Chaudhuri to suggest that Subrahmanyam’s intellectual integrity wins over in the end. As he states, “he comes to represent sound historical thinking and knowledge, as well as rationality and logic, in contrast to Nandy’s whimsy, romanticism and lack of clear thinking.” Subrahmanyam’s ability to affirm the boundaries of exchange within these terms, serves therefore, to cast Nandy as a whimsical, innocent child-like figure, a peripheral or minor player within the psychic life of power; a power which Subrahmanyam claims through the certitudes and security of his intellectual integrity and identity.

Chaudhuri disputes Subrahmanyam’s characterisation of Nandy’s iconic status. To what extent can there even be a general consensus regarding Nandy’s iconic status, he asks, given his threatening presence within this exchange and the debates at large. For example, he recognises that Nandy’s work does not fit into any of the major Indian social science discourses given that he is “too unrigorous, too dissonant to inhabit their contours.” This outsider status imbues Nandy’s intellectual identity and his mode of dissent with a certain possibility but which in this instance is inaudible given the logic, which over determines these responses. He therefore challenges whether such aggrandisement of figures like Nandy is productive given that more than likely, “he is fated to be a minority voice.” Chaudhuri thus offers a very different reading of

\[36\] This is explored in the final section of the dissertation where I offer a characterisation of the critical idiom of Nandy’s work. See *Part C, Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic.*
Nandy’s intellectual significance. The question that he asks is a more productive one: whether there is a place for such a voice in our community of liberal intellectuals?

This possible place is complicated further by the question of the role of the dissenter and the role of the critic, especially a critic of secularism and modernity like Nandy, writing from within post-colonial India. This questions the conditions of dissent and raises the “question here, then, of what can be said and what can’t, and of the pitfalls of language.” For Chaudhuri, “it’s the paradox of the language of our nationalism; that it contained within it the seeds both of our secular middle class and its fundamentalist other, our pluralism and our intolerance.” This paradox and the accompanying anxieties regarding the nation prevent a recognition and deeper engagement with the other. The significance of a critic like Nandy lies in his role as a critic of the post-Independence Indian middle classes that for them is encapsulated in a modern and secular Indian nation state. For Chaudhuri the issue of difference is as Nandy’s connection between modernity and the West is flawed. This reading of the Indian middle classes as westernised leaves Nandy open to a series of criticisms. Chaudhuri conceptualises this by claiming that the problem arises “from the darkness of our inherited language of self-definition.” Nandy’s position can be understood as belonging to a generation for whom the indigenous was integral to India independence from colonial rule, and had a distinctive role to play within the independence movements. The conceptual category of the indigenous was central to defining an anti-colonial self, but at least today in the contemporary Indian political landscape the category has been displaced from this vital role. It has now been hijacked, mobilised and transformed by the forces of the Hindu Right. This highlights the ways in which the indigenous is made over as political identities in modern India. Against this backdrop Chaudhuri questions whether Subrahmanyam is talking about the traditional or modern India when he defends Indian secularism in his article.

Although Chaudhuri does not necessarily subscribe to Nandy’s anti-secular position he is able to acknowledge his critical efforts within the exchange in far more complex terms, and connects these efforts to a particular intellectual culture. As a critic Nandy invites us to radically question the ways in which an ideal can very quickly become a piety. Secularism as a political ideal is no exception, especially amongst the

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Indian middle classes. In such an intellectual and political culture it is all the more imperative Chaudhuri suggests that a critic like Nandy in spite of his phobic status, has a presence. The job of a robust, self-critical intelligentsia to recognise the significance of critics like Nandy, rather than revert to the persecutory logic evident within the debate. A critic like Nandy needs to be evaluated in terms of his own contributions to a robust intelligentsia and not in antithetical terms, in terms of supporting an anti-secular view and an anti-modern view. Despite the limitations of Nandy’s position whatever these may be for a writer like Chaudhuri he remains a “provocative and necessary figure” in contributing to such an intellectual culture.41 Where his contributions have been most welcomed he suggests is in questioning the growing middle classes in India or what is often referred to as the new secular ruling class, which began to form during the 1980s in Northern India around the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi.42 Critics like Nandy who have been consistent and visible voices since this time in questioning this political culture have a significant role to play. In the end Chaudhuri paints a more complex picture of Nandy as an important dissenting voice, one that contrasts Subrahmanyam’s defensive caricature of Nandy. Whether or not a figure like Nandy can even carry the discursive weight of the symptomatic explored thus far remains questioned for Chaudhuri. He explains this in the following way by stating that, “he may be too eccentric, too much a minority voice for us to call him, as Auden called Freud, quoting Alfred Whitehead, a whole climate of opinion.”43

Nandy as the phobic object has a distinctive discursive presence within the exchange, and while Chaudhuri’s analysis recognises this significance he argues that the idiom of his dissent prevents Nandy from being recognised as a whole climate of opinion. Within such a discursive field Nandy is neither a body of knowledge nor a marginal figure but remains the disruptive, ambiguous voice which threatens the established system of organization and of meaning that are the boundaries between secularism and anti-secularism, public and private, self and other. Although within this exchange Nandy is cast as the radical stranger, the phobic object and the abject, he has over the years contributed significantly to a range of academic and public debates.

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41 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 3.
42 Chaudhuri continues that, “in India, around the same time, a new ‘secular’ ruling class began to form, after the death of Indira Gandhi, around Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi. This class has on occasion made secularism part of its civilising mission, its pre-destined, quasi-imperial role in India. See Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 3.
43 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 4.
These contributions over the last thirty-five years or so, whilst not a whole climate of opinion does confirm that, “this Nandy is hardly an innocent or simple nativist, he’s an extraordinary shrewd and cosmopolitan observer.” For Chaudhuri the figure of the cosmopolitan confronts and disrupts the certitudes underpinning the positioning of the boundaries of the Indian nation, drawn so clearly by Subrahmanyam.

5.5 Re-affirming the Boundary of the Impossible the Intolerable

In Chaudhuri’s article the attempts to characterise the logic of debate beckons a less than favourable response from Subrahmanyam. In his article “A Guru and his Followers: A Colonial Thinker” published in The Telegraph of Calcutta in August 8, 2004. Subrahmanyam argues that Chaudhuri in engaging with Nandy expresses admiration for him and his project. From then on the article reads as a corrective attempt to redress many of these representations that are we are told are “largely unfounded.” He begins by challenging Chaudhuri’s portrayal of the public debate as limited citing the Journal Economic and Political Weekly as one of the key forums for scholarly debate within India. Subrahmanyam raises even stronger objections over Chaudhuri’s representation of Nandy as a marginal figure within public and scholarly debates on Indian secularism. Subrahmanyam in recognising the threat of the phobic and disruption present within the abject cannot afford Nandy such a moderate and sympathetic characterisation. Rather he maintains that his representation of Nandy as a Colonial Thinker has become a guru for commentators like Chaudhuri. Subrahmanyam’s defence against this runs as follows: “it is a conceit to believe that this best-selling author from Oxford University Press and Princeton University Press, whose books are used in cultural studies and post-colonial studies courses in many parts of the world, is simply a marginal figure, a minority voice, an eccentric.”

Subrahmanyam suggests, consistent with his earlier argument that Nandy’s significance or status is best understood as a kind of guru, an influence which extends beyond the Indian intellectual scene. This does not deter him from asking who the followers of this guru are. He offers a few suggestions beginning with the guilt

44 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 4.
46 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ibid., 1.
complexes of the Indian middle class who, we are told “flock to buy his books.” The next category identified is a certain brand of thinker belonging to Subaltern Studies or Post-Colonial Studies. There is a further category where Nandy has found a following in the extreme right wing of Hindu nationalists, where his sympathies for culturalism are applauded. The politics of blame is activated here as Subrahmanyam again invokes the political threat Nandy provokes. Nandy as a point of condensation for these ills is taken to its limit with Subrahmanyam’s anecdotal relay of “a frightening occasion” where at a Seminar in London he “rose to make an impassioned defence of the RSS, [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] as true freedom fighters against the Emergency.” The example serves to highlight and warn the reader of the dangers Nandy poses. This is a serious charge to make. Subrahmanyam does not hesitate to implicate Nandy as complicit within these ideological currents and in endorsing this political organization that has a chequered and controversial historical presence within Indian politics. He reaffirms the chain of association invoked in Radhika Desai’s work in aligning Nandy’s intellectual interests with the political imperatives of the Hindu Right.

Given Nandy’s political complicities Subrahmanyam rhetorically asks, “So who does not find Ashis Nandy today significant, provocative and necessary?” This support base now extends to Marxists, Dalit intellectuals and to even “sensible historians” who read his attempts at “myth making” at best as a form of anti-intellectualism and at worst as a form of strong irrationalism. This is a point already invoked within the logic of the debate and contrasted against Subrahmanyam’s own intellectualism and rationality that underpins his scholarly commitment, particularly his reading of history. Ultimately, he follows through with the representation of Nandy as a phobic object, focusing on his dangerous political ties and dubious threatening

47 In relation to Nandy, Subrahmanyam argues that, “his anti-science, anti-modernity, anti-technology, writings quite clearly appeal to a part of the Indian middle class, which revels in its guilt, and so flocks to buy his books. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ibid., 1.
48 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ibid. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the National Association of Self-helpers is a voluntary organisation focusing on developing society based on Hinduism – which they claim is the essence of Hinduism. Established in 1925 it was founded by Dr. K.B. Hedgewar when he unfurled the Bhagawadhaj-saffron flag at a camp in Amaravati. Hedgewar talked of a Hindu-Rashtra, but it was his successor, M.S. Golwalkar, popularly known as Guruji who expounded its ideology. The RSS has had a colourful yet checked presence on the Indian political scene. It has been banned twice in India, and despite this had remained a strong and popular political force finding support and expression during particular periods of political unrest. It’s presence as a political ideology has diminished over the last five to ten years amongst a backlash of criticism, scholarly and public regarding its communal foundations. For further information refer to Kamat’s description of this movement as a sub-culture within Indian culture. http://www.kamat.com/indica/culture/sub-cultures/rss.htm
intellectual allegiances. Carrying the heritage of the Bengal Renaissance, Nandy is re-staged as a Colonial Thinker because of “his utter subservience to Orientalist clichés regarding India’s past.”\textsuperscript{50} No longer is Nandy simply a romantic provocateur for he remains a prisoner of the heritage, of his anti-colonial heritage. Amit Chaudhuri’s essay many drip with cultural cringe and the cliché trappings attached to it as Subrahmanyam suggests but for him such analysis only serves to reaffirm Nandy’s own culturalist leanings.

The article which follows this is a piece written by Swapan Dasgupta under the title; “Cultural Cringe: Reducing Colonialism to a single design is poor history” published in \textit{The Telegraph of Calcutta} on August 13, 2004. The essay is worthy of brief mention because it introduces a new voice into the debate or another voice that re-iterates the symptomatic. Dasgupta offers little by way of interrogating with any depth or complexity these terms of engagement or the logic operating within the debates. He acknowledges the importance of such exchanges given that “the impact of official secularism has been horribly divisive.”\textsuperscript{51} Citing Ashis Nandy’s iconoclastic “Anti-Secular Manifesto” as triggering the “first lively debate of the Manmohan Singh era,” he argues that the participants in this exchange have also managed to resurrect a controversy “that many believe has run out of intellectual steam.”\textsuperscript{52} For Dasgupta one of the problems with such exchanges is that the debate is too focused around the question of colonialism and its aftermath. This amounts to the, “comic spectacle of the secularist, the traditionalist and the communalist heaping the same abuse at each other.”\textsuperscript{53}

Dasgupta takes issue with Nandy for charging the Indian political leadership with a deracination born of colonialism, and then explores how the Hindu nationalists, in turn charge the Marxists and Secularists with pursuing a colonialist agenda. In contrast to this, he suggests the Subaltern Studies group set out to demonstrate their impeccable anti-colonial credentials. He thus references the intellectual differences within the

\textsuperscript{50} Sanjay Subrahmanyam, \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{51} Dasgupta states, “The debate has been fiery, passionate and occasionally quite riveting. It has dominated political choice, affected the writing and teaching of history, and polarized the arts and professions like journalism. At a human level, it has both soured traditional bonds and forged unlikely solidarities. Thrust into the preamble of the Constitution under the draconian cover of the Emergency, the impact of official secularism has been horribly divisive.” Swapan Dasgupta, “Cultural Cringe: Reducing colonialism to a single design is poor history,” \textit{The Telegraph}, (13 August 2004): 1
\textsuperscript{52} Dasgupta also makes reference to an agreeable symmetry in that Ashis Nandy’s ‘An Anti-Secular Manifesto’ was first published in 1985 in \textit{Outlook} Magazine and now twenty years on is still drawing critique and commentary. Swapan Dasgupta, \textit{Ibid.}, 1
\textsuperscript{53} Swapan Dasgupta, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
debate as being organised around a (mis)reading of colonialism, Dasgupta falls prey to his own critique. He warns that, “to reduce it (colonialism) to a monochromatic image and a single experience is good pamphleteering but poor history.”

Dasgupta reframes the debate in terms of what constitutes good history already established by Subrahmanyam’s account of acceptable historical narrative. What is questioned is whether Nandy like the genuine secularists shares the good intentions with respect to wanting India free of sectarian conflict. The other side to such a question is whether the phobic object may speak in a language of good intentions? If Nandy is a traitor to his classes, can he be anything other than the voice of the traitor? While the answer to these questions is already provided by the logic underpinning the debate, Dasgupta too remains locked within these modes of representation.

5.6 The Limits of Dissent: Discontent and the Question of Narcissism

The article which closes this exchange is by Amit Chaudhuri titled “Natural Proclivities: So little fruitful dissent, so much private discontent.” The piece published on August 14th, 2004 in The Telegraph of Calcutta was written prior the printing of Dasgupta’s article. In this respect Chaudhuri’s piece speaks directly to Subrahmanyam’s article and clearly re-states his intentions in the following way. “My article was written not so much to take sides as to consider whether civilized and intelligent debate is part of the discourse of the Indian secular intelligentsia; if not, why not.” The answers to this question as to why the airing of disagreements and free exchange of ideas is truncated and “is so difficult in India is evident from Subrahmanyam’s article itself.” For Chaudhuri, the logic he invokes defines him as an uninteresting polemicist. “Since the debate has descended into personal attacks,” the

54 Swapan Dasgupta, Ibid., 2.
55 Chaudhuri makes note of this point in the postscript to the article. He writes the following: “Postscript: I composed the piece that appears above before reading Swapan Dasgupta’s contribution on Friday morning (“Cultural Cringe,” 13 August). About a couple of years ago, I felt a sense of disquiet when I read a laudatory review of Nandy by Dasgupta. Nandy is better off without such supporters, I thought to myself. Nandy is a critic of power; Dasgupta has a weather-vane-like susceptibility to it. Subrahmanyam should think seriously about why he’s found an admirer in Dasgupta.” Amit Chaudhuri, “Natural Proclivities: So little fruitful dissent, so much private discontent,” The Telegraph, (14 August 2004).
56 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 1.
57 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 1.
question remains whether any fruitful dissent can ensue under these conditions, within such logic of persecution.\textsuperscript{58}

Chaudhuri explores why it is that so little fruitful dissent conceals so much private discontent, or why private discontent works to limit the possibilities of dissent. Commenting on Subrahmanyam’s characteristic manner it is “argumentativeness, not argumentation” that is the defining style underpinning his contribution, though this conceals a more disturbing feature in his analysis.\textsuperscript{59} Chaudhuri questions Subrahmanyam’s own methods of critique including the gossip and apocrypha he introduces into the debate with his claim that Nandy once defended the RSS. Such a serious charge, which remains un-referenced and un-validated, is inconsistent with the scholarly benchmarks he is so eager to emphasise in the exchange. This demonstrates the symptomatic at work, as a means of containing the threat and disruption that Nandy, irrespective of his political affiliations, still carries forward. Such statements are recognised by Chaudhuri as dangerous, not least because they operate to affirm Nandy as a point of condensation for a number of anxieties and fears. Although Chaudhuri does not adopt a psychoanalytic framework to explain these representations of phobia and abjection, he argues that these function as an, “ad hominem attack and the threat of being made into a pariah.”\textsuperscript{60} For Chaudhuri it is this mode of critical engagement, a recrimination and retribution that “seems to pass for civilized disagreement amongst our secular intelligentsia.”\textsuperscript{61}

Chaudhuri highlights the inability for a scholar of Subrahmanyam’s calibre to engage intellectually with his interlocutor, that is to think beyond camps and group affiliations, expressed in the psychic organization of phobia and threat. Rather he focusses on a motley crew, spearheaded by Ashis Nandy, consisting of members or targets that have very little in common with each other. Chaudhuri undermines this logic by aligning Subrahmanyam in service of his personal discontent. He explains this in the following way: “The creation of this group, then, and the critical method in his piece, are directed principally by Subrahmanyam’s narcissism, his unspoken but powerful immersion in what people feel about him and what he feels about people.”\textsuperscript{62} If

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\textsuperscript{58} Amit Chaudhuri, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\textsuperscript{59} As Chaudhuri states, “Subrahmanyam may be a good historian, but he’s an uninteresting polemicist.” Amit Chaudhuri, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\textsuperscript{60} Amit Chaudhuri, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\textsuperscript{61} Amit Chaudhuri, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\textsuperscript{62} Amit Chaudhuri, \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\end{flushleft}
narcissism defines the driving impetus for critique, all critical exchange is, therefore, set up against this yardstick of confirming what Chaudhuri calls the “absolute correctness of his own position.” Here narcissism functions as a defence mechanism against both the territorial and personal anxieties provoked by the phobic object. Where natural proclivities or territorial affiliations characterise the discursive field, and impose the boundaries and limits of critical exchange. Yet again such a symptomatic response is revealing, for the narcissistic structure is crucial in understanding these dynamics of insecurity, threat and disruption that Nandy represents in these debates.

To suggest that narcissism operates within these debates as a defence mechanism is to recognise the boundaries defining the terms of exchange. Narcissism consistent with Kristeva’s reading and its connection to her concept of abjection denotes a borderline case, or a case of brittle and precarious borders. In her reading of the abject and abjection in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982) she reworks the Freudian account of primary narcissism into these processes. Abjection then being the “pre-condition of narcissism” and therefore “a kind of narcissistic crisis,” but which appears as a regression and for Kristeva is distinctly set back from the other. This is a retreat into a self-referential mode of engaging with the other. As Kristeva elaborates, “narcissism then appears as a regression to a position set back from the other, a return to a self-contemplative, conservative, self-sufficient haven.” Positioning the boundaries is fundamental given that modern Narcissus, Chanter and Ziarek argue “is not sure of herself, of her borders, or her identity; she is on the border between security and insecurity, between fusion and separation.” The concept of narcissism adds further to understanding the boundaries operating. This adds another layer of complexity for thinking through the ways in which the boundaries of intellectual engagement established through the symptomatic register work to conceal and cover over a state of insecurity. Freud describes the covering over as an illusory omnipotence. In Strangers

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63 Amit Chaudhuri, Ibid., 2.
64 Julia Kristeva argues that, “the more or less beautiful image in which I behold or recognize myself rests upon an abjection that sunders it as soon as repression, the constant watchman, is relaxed.” Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 13.
65 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 13-14.
67 Freud’s essay On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914) and Kristeva’s reading of this is commented on by a number of theorists. See for instance Sarah Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). Ewa Ziarek, An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism and the Politics of Radical Democracy, (California: Stanford University Press,
to Ourselves (1991) Kristeva develops this need to rupture and re-position the boundaries between self and other in order to heal a narcissistic wound. Explored against the backdrop of French national culture where the stranger and foreigner like the phobic object is abjected from view, she emphasises this connection to narcissism. She states that, “to become capable of loving our neighbour as our self, we have first of all to heal a wounded narcissism.” 68 This narcissism prevents us from acknowledging our own radical alterity, the otherness and the stranger who is within. The encounter with that that has been cast away and abjected, leads to the breakdown of these narcissistic structures. The other’s otherness or radical strangeness then enables recognition of our own internal and intimate strangeness.

If Nandy is to be recognised within the exchange and the debates at large as the entitled subject then the existing modes of reception and representation, including the relationship between self and other need to be reconsidered. In Kristeva’s terms then if the relationship with the other is to be seriously addressed then narcissistic identity must be reconstituted, in order to be able to extend a hand to the other. Thus what is needed she says is a reassurance against the existing defence mechanism. This facilitates the process for reparation, reconstructing narcissism, personality and subjectivity in order for there to be a relation to the other, outside of this pre-existing regressive structure. The reassurance or reparation in our relations between self and other are for Kristeva made possible through a shattering or negativisation of the narcissistic structure. As Ewa Ziarek emphasises, this leads to an acknowledgement, a confronting one at that, of our internal alterity and subjectivity as we come face to face with our radical strangeness. 69 This leads to a profound recognition of “the strange within the familiar but also to the possible projection of this discovery onto the Other.” 70 In these processes the other is afforded a greater complexity. For Kristeva this includes recognition of the other’s subjectivity and humanity. The question that remains is whether the participants represented in this exchange demonstrate this capacity in extending a hand to the other. Is this even a question that can be asked given the presence of the symptomatic? Given

69 Ziarek argues that “Kristeva analyses many instances of the subject’s own unsettling heterogeneity – the abject [which is the main focus here] the uncanny, the death drive, sex and the aporia of primary narcissism – all of which point not only to different modalities of ‘the strange within the familiar’ but also to the possible projection of this discovery onto the Other.” For a discussion of this refer to Ewa Ziarek, An Ethics of Dissensus, (2001):127.
70 Ewa Ziarek, Ibid., 127.
the complex defence mechanisms Subrahmanyam, Nayar and Dasgupta demonstrate it is unlikely within this exchange. The exception to this is Chaudhuri who comes close to recognising the possibility that Nandy’s radical strangeness provides in disrupting an existing narcissistic logic. As Chaudhuri argues, as long as this narcissistic wound remains unhealed then Subrahmanyam’s narcissism, along with this persecutory logic, also operating in these other responses by critics, remains fixed in place.

The healing of the narcissistic wound would entail a break away from the logic structuring the symptomatic. Therefore, where such personal discontent reigns supreme, it is little surprise that such little fruitful dissent ensues; when dissent itself remains confined or subject to these psychic processes. The concept of narcissism that appears, as Sarah Bearsworth notes when our capacities and relations to others “are weakened or collapsed,” also sheds further light on the question of dissent.\(^1\) It is interesting to note that it is Nandy in this exchange that acknowledges this connection. We may well ask whether it is Nandy’s abject status, his own recognition of the instability of meaning that provides him with this capacity?\(^2\) This finds expression as he tells us in demarcating between official dissenters and the others that do not register. The official dissenter is assured then with the ontologically secure position of the insider within the debates. In contrast Nandy whose borderline status elicits responses of fascination and horror is neither an outsider who can be ignored nor an insider to be acknowledged. Nandy’s position marked by its lack of recognition therefore raises the question of whether the idiom of his mode of critique is outside of this narcissistic crisis underpinning the politics of blame. In this vein Chaudhuri comes to a poignant realisation in the exchange when he concedes the limitations in evaluating the significance of Nandy within these terms. If Nandy’s own mode of engagement is outside and as I argue, breaks away from this persecutory and narcissistic dynamic, then this opens up new possibilities for dissent and critical intervention.

5.7 The Abject Figure as Criminal

This final example of this persecutory logic brings us to the beginning of 2008, where Nandy was cast not only as the disruptive figure, but was made over as an

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\(^2\) I explore this proposition further in the following section of the dissertation. See *Part C, Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic.*
accused in a criminal case. This took place through the attempts to criminalise his identity by Narrenwa Modi, Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat for the publication of an article critical of the outcome, and Modi’s re-election, in the 2007 elections. Published in a leading daily Ahmedabad broadsheet The Times of India, the response to Nandy’s article “Gujarat: Blame The Middle Class” (8th January 2008) exemplifies the perceived need to abject Nandy from view. In the article Nandy consistent with his psychoanalytic approach as advanced in this dissertation, explores the features and subjectivity that defines political culture in Gujarat. Of particular interest are the ways in which a dominant and official culture of fear and hatred against minorities dominates politics and middle-class attitudes. Nandy notes that even if Modi had lost the elections in Gujarat this political culture and its attitudes would have remained unchanged. As he notes, “forty years of dedicated propaganda does pay dividends, electorally and socially.”

Nandy confronts the processes of subjection operating in Hindu nationalist attitudes and the ways this re-constitute individual and collective subjectivity. He points out for instance Gujarati Muslim’s are now adjusting to their new station as second-class citizens. Yet what is interesting about Nandy’s analysis are the ways in which his comments and the responses to it work to reconstitute Nandy’s subjectivity.

The charges laid against Nandy by the Modi State Government are for inciting animosity between communities. It is understood that Nandy’s presence as a public commentator on these issues is underpinned by a more over political and threatening agenda. The logic at play and demonstrated in the criminal charges laid, indicate the full extent of Nandy’s real and perceived threat and disruption. Although the charges were laid in response to this particular article, the over-determined response to criminalise Nandy is an accumulation of complex internalised fears and threats. Are these actions simply the reaction and defence of an aggrieved Gujarati Hindu majority? For the 150 academics and activists from India and internationally who protested against these charges, the action taken against Nandy is part of larger processes. They argue, that

“This is the latest case of harassment of intellectuals, journalists, artists and public figures by anti-democratic forces that claim to speak on behalf of Hindu values sometimes and patriotism at other

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times, especially Gujarat, who have little understanding of either.”

These comments set the scene for situating Nandy within larger anti-democratic forces at play within Indian political culture. However, they also conceptualise the status that is afforded the alleged criminal figure. In confronting the constituting features of these Hindu values and claims over patriotism, Nandy’s voice is cast by the state as the anti-patriotic, and by extension anti-Indian voice. It is this voice that is subject to policing and potential criminalization by the state that draws on the language of civil liberties to achieve its ends. Consistent with Kristeva’s concept of the abject, the actions of the Modi Government to criminalise Nandy’s subjectivity confirms his abject status. Nandy is cast as that which “does not respect, border, positions, rules.” Kristeva continues that, “any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.”

To Kristeva’s list of crime we can add the crime of inciting communal tensions not only because it transgresses the official secular political ideal of tolerance but because it also reveals the fragility of the ideal and is defence.

As Nandy publicly states in response to the charges and in response to representations of his subjectivity, “this is just being done to silence people like me.” Nevertheless, the charges demonstrate the significance that is afforded Nandy as a dissenting, threatening and abject figure. While the Supreme Court has dismissed the charges, Nandy as the threatening and disruptive figure does not redeem his innocence within representations of his subjectivity but rather retains the slurs of an accused in a criminal matter. The contested hearing was held in the Supreme Court in Delhi, and was dismissed on the grounds that Nandy had no case to answer. The dismissing of the charges reinstate to some extent subjectivity to Nandy that had previously been denied in his representation as an alleged criminal and abject public figure. Despite the official matter being resolved, the incident demonstrates the threat and fear that Nandy continues to carry forward in public debates. In distinguishing between us and him, critics including the Modi government are able through the positioning of these

76 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 4.
boundaries to further consolidate a series of threatening associations, emphasising Nandy’s conceptual flaws and radically questioning his subjectivity, significance and integrity within this intellectual culture. Cast as the phobic object and as the abject, this questioning of intellectual integrity collapses into a generalised attack on his moral credentials. For as John Letche claims, “the one who is abject lacks authenticity, that is lacks any detectable moral consistency.”

Reclaiming the subjectivity of the abject figure is a task that must be carried forth elsewhere, that is outside of such symptomatic exchanges, responses and representations.

Where Achin Vanaik’s and Radhika Desai’s reading of Nandy and his work demonstrates the ways in which this symptomatic register is formed, then this public debate carried out five and six years later in 2004 demonstrates the repetition of this persecutory logic, as a distinctive feature of the debates of Indian secularism. Fearful of the phobic object and the threatening disruptive force of the abject these defence mechanisms actuated through the symptomatic register as a politics of blame operate to safeguard an existing and dominant political Imaginary predicated on a secular ideal. The challenge to this ideal is internalised within these debates and recognised by Chaudhuri as intense personal discontent, and that finds, as Kristeva would note a symbolic existence within narcissism. Whereby “its strategies (rejecting, separating, repeating/abjecting) hence find a symbolic existence, and the very logic of the symbolic –arguments, demonstrations, proofs, etc – must conform to it.”

The result of which is that this logic and the terms of exchange within this public debate truncate the possibilities for fruitful dissent. For irrespective of whether Nandy is the voice of anti-secularism in India; applauded in indigenist circles; spearheads the discourses of culturalism and neo-Gandhianism; is a certified communalist; or even an apologist for the RSS, within these debates on secularism he is made over as the “object [that] ceases to be circumscribed, reasoned with, thrust aside: [and] appears as abject.”

Within these responses Nandy and in particular his confronting psychoanalytic approach and method typically cannot be reasoned with. Although these claims are also not necessarily reasoned with and worked through this is the source of critics’ agitation.

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78 “Thus the corpse which is both human and non-human, waste and filth which are neither entirely inside or outside the socio-subjective order, are examples of the abject. And so too are the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscious, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. Abjection thus corresponds to fundamental hypocrisy in morality and politics.” For further discussion refer to John Letche, Julia Kristeva, (London: Routledge, 1990): 160.


80 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 15.
Therefore, if condensation determines the symptom; then such representations of Nandy’s intellectual identity and his work, staged for an academic audience or a broader public reception, remain symptomatic, and continue to reproduce this politics of blame as a distinctive feature of the debates on Indian secularism.

I have argued that in the critiques discussed, the responses and representations to Ashis Nandy as critic and to his work are over-determined by a persecutory logic that is expressed through a series or a chain of threatening significations. In focusing on two responses by Achin Vanaik and Radhika Desai I detailed at length the ways in which Nandy’s intellectual identity and his contributions to the debates on secularism elicit a series of symptomatic responses. In Achin Vanaik’s work, that which is symptomatic is expressed within the conceptual battleground of Indian secularism, where a showdown of sorts ensues between Vanaik’s defence of the secular ideal, and Nandy’s disavowal of this possibility. In Vanaik’s characterisation Nandy represents the anti-secular position; is the spokesperson for anti-secularism in India and therefore sympathetic to a number of anti-secular beliefs, concepts and political affiliations. According to Vanaik the antidote to secularism is to be found in, “…more authentically indigenous notion[s] of active organization of religious toleration.”

This position for Vanaik is not far removed from the culturalist or immortaliser of religion and leads him to unveil Nandy’s hostile anti-modern stridencies. From this conceptual battleground where the boundaries of difference are established and accentuated, flows a chain of threatening signifiers including Nandy’s strong culturalism, his anti-modernism, anti-secularism, his anti-West, anti-science and anti-Statism positions. For Vanaik this affirms his intellectual contribution as that of an ornamental dissenter.

Radhika Desai rallies against Nandy’s anti-secular position, now as a dangerous culturalism, which is moreover intellectually irresponsible. Desai casts Nandy’s critical modality as irrationalised culturalism, and part of the intellectual resurgence of neo-Gandhian thought, which in her account nurtures a threatening complicity with contemporary ideologies of the Indian Hindu Right. In this guise Nandy is an anathema to Desai’s cautionary voice. To this extent Nandy’s intellectual milieu is deemed to contribute to a cultural politics, which aligns itself to political support and commitment for the ideology of Hindutva, and as an attempt to redefine Hindutva for particular

political ends. The dangers of this anti-secularism are now not simply questions of intellectual credibility within the conceptual battleground but have serious and detrimental political consequences. In a continuation of this argument Kuldip Nayar reinforces Nandy’s confusion of tradition with religion, a sympathy that bares an uncanny resemblance to the wave of support for communalism displayed in the 1970s by the neo-Gandhians. Here again Nandy, in his proto-Gandhian guise, can be seen as faltering in his intellectual commitment and allegiance to a secular solution to India’s communal problems. For Nayar, Nandy’s reading of tolerance is attributable less to the internal workings of traditions, and more with the strength of Indian Secularism itself, though he misrecognises this connection. In contrast Sanjay Subrahmanyam acknowledges that Nandy’s call for a deeper understanding of traditions and religious concepts of tolerance, which alongside secular ideology and policies of tolerance have their own long history in India, is a task worth pursuing. Yet Nandy cannot be a serious contender for this undertaking given his intellectual integrity, methods and writing are all found wanting. Subrahmanyam suggests that a figure like Nandy, despite his guru-like status in Western institutions, is best understood as a great colonial thinker and as a romantic product of the Bengal Renaissance. Subrahmanyam’s portrayal, particularly of Nandy as a colonial thinker, leaves the reader with little doubt that his intellectual significance is limited by these particular traditions and constituencies, and ultimately, regressive in meaningful debates on Indian secularism.

These responses to Nandy’s work are symptomatic in that they reveal a threatening chain of signification established between Nandy’s intellectual identity and his critique of secularism, in order to ward off the threat and disruption he represents. The symptomatic is also revealed in the ways in which Nandy’s position on secularism, his arguments and ideas are typically ignored and his work is seldom afforded a complex reading, given the serious and vitriolic charges made against him. As outlined, substantial argumentation and engagement with Nandy’s critique is often overlooked, if not sacrificed, in the name of this persecutory logic, which over determines these responses and representations. So too is an engagement with Nandy’s methods compromised by this logic, as his psychoanalytic approach to questioning the cultural and psychological viability of secularism is overlooked, if not dismissed. For instance in Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s case, disparaging and injurious hearsay takes the place of
scholarly argument, ironically a characteristic of which he accuses Nandy. The point remains that Nandy’s anti-secularism, his reading of non-sectarian sources of tolerance for communal amity, his critique of State Secularism and the Hindu Right though alluded to, are rarely cited or explored in detail. Of course a level of detail, engagement and argumentation is not possible given the discursive limits at play, though Vanaik at least, affords Nandy’s work some consideration. His critique offers an erudite condemnation of anti-secularism as an intellectual current and its anti-modern stridencies. One could not accuse Vanaik of not acknowledging the complexity of the issues at hand, despite the limits and limitations of his critique. This does not detract though from the overriding limitations, intellectual and psychic, which already exist, marring the possibilities for critical engagement and dissent. Amit Chaudhuri effectively makes this point, in questioning the positioning of the boundaries constituting debate and dissent. That is to say that the symptomatic responses organised around a persecutory logic; a politics of blame with so much personal discontent, determines the rules of engagement. It establishes what can and cannot be debated, not withstanding the presence of narcissism functioning as a defence mechanism against the territorial and personal anxieties that Nandy, as the phobic object and abjection, evokes.

Chaudhuri’s questioning of this exchange enables him to draw attention to the limitations in evaluating the intellectual significance of Ashis Nandy within these terms. In depicting Nandy as a point of condensation, as both phobic object and abjection, and re-staged within the debates, his continuing threatening subjectivity is assured. The possible merits of an alternative critique are diminished by an intellectual culture predicated on a series of defences, which are intimately tied to a particular secular political culture and intellectually to a secular ideal. This inability to recognise Nandy as an entitled subject points to an important impasse and fixity in logic and meaning which the symptomatic register preserves within these debates. The source of this individual and collective anxiety is, as I have argued, intimately tied to questions of

82 Here I am specifically referring to Subrahmanym’s account in his article where he claims Nandy as a supporter of the RSS at a lecture given in London. The incident is mentioned as hearsay and not referenced or substantiated within the article, other than by Subrahmanym’s intellectual voice as an authoritative voice. Refer to Sanjay Subrahmanym, “A Guru And His Followers: A Colonial Thinker,” The Telegraph, (8 August 2004).
83 The point I am making is that unlike some of the other critics discussed, Vanaik does reference a number of Nandy’s works including critical pieces of secularism. To some extent he identifies and even discusses concepts and arguments put forward, though again this engagement is limited. This cannot be said, for example, of Sanjay Subrahmanym or Kuldip Nayar who, within the articles discussed, does not reference or cite any of Nandy’s works, despite the claims made against him.
national identity and collective identification, notwithstanding the ontological security that is derived from the operation of this dominant political imaginary. The task though is not to enter into a counter-defensive mode to evaluate the intellectual significance of Ashis Nandy; nor to contrast this with, say, the insignificance of these existing critical voices, because they are symptomatic. Such a reading is problematic because it again invokes an analogous persecutory logic as counter-defence. It serves little function other than to re-affirm an existing logic already detailed at length. If an argument that Nandy’s own mode of engagement is outside of this persecutory and narcissistic mode is to be developed, and that recognition of this critical modality is foreclosed by the symptomatic, then this can only be explored outside of the logic underpinning such responses. More importantly it is also only outside of this discursive space that Nandy can be afforded the status of the entitled subject and his subjectivity, identity and psychoanalytic methods outlined in more complex terms.

How though does Nandy distinguish himself as outside of this persecutory logic? In the following chapter I elaborate further on the processes of confrontation that Nandy enters into in his critique of secularism. I elaborate on this confrontation in terms of his willingness to confront that, which is deemed abject in Indian secular political culture. Nandy’s willingness to confront and furthermore work through the complexities of a dominant and fiercely defended secular ideal also exemplifies autonomy of thought. While this autonomy is noted to some extent in this public exchange, the complexity in having arrived at this intellectual destination is overlooked. In confronting a dominant ideology and working through aspects of self and of culture deemed disruptive and threatening Nandy radically challenges dominant and accepted meanings, ideals, fantasies, projections and identities. I argue that his confrontation with the abject, with what is expelled in the formation of subjectivity ruptures our understanding of politics. Nandy ruptures our understandings and also invites us into a broader conceptualisation of politics. Therefore the starting point for exploring his willing confrontation must be with those features and characteristics that are deemed threatening and disruptive. This is “the state in which one’s foothold in the world of self and other disintegrates.”84 In this moment of threat and loss of subjectivity, that is in abjection there is however, the possibility of (re)creating meaning or signification. The possibility of re-claiming meaning and re-claiming the voice of the critic is evident in the two written replies

84 Noelle McAfee, Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship, (2000): 120.
Nandy gives to his critics, Achin Vanaik and Kuldeep Nayar. It is in these responses that Nandy’s commitment for confrontation is theorised and is distinguished as outside of a politics of blame. It is also in these responses that Nandy’s psychoanalytic focus in confronting the boundaries of politics is explored.
PART C

Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic
“And to venture even further:
if we were not all translators,
if we did not unceasingly lay bare
the foreignness
of our inner lives –
its departures from the stereotypical codes
we call national languages –
in order to transpose this foreignness into other signs,
would we have a psychical life at all,
would we be living beings?

…speaking an ‘other language,’
in other words,
is quite simply the minimum
and primary condition
for
being
alive.”

Julia Kristeva

*Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2 (2002)*
Chapter 6:  
Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics

In this chapter I explore in greater detail Nandy’s willing confrontation with secularism. I argue that this confrontation is fundamental to understanding Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach and the way this further distinguishes his work and identity as critic, in the debates on Indian secularism. This defiance and aptitude for confrontation is demonstrated in the autonomy of thought that distinguishes his work, but which as I have detailed, is also the source of fascination and horror for critics. For Nandy, this confrontation is essential if the effects of the distortions of dominant ideologies are to be seriously addressed. The other notable feature of confrontation is that it imbues his work with a reflexivity and self-reflexivity for the inclusions and exclusions operating in politics. He reflects on this confrontation in the following passage, stating “…that instead of looking for other ways of, in which you can achieve the goals of secularism in a more human society, they [secularists] want a higher dose of the same medicine to solve all the problems. And I thought that was a chimera.”¹ His recognition of the secular ideal as chimera is a distinctive break away from an existing and dominant logic of persecution, idealisation and defence. Confrontation here also denotes traversing the fantasy structure that accompanies the defence of secularism. For instance, Nandy confronts and traverses the dominant view that communal amity can only be safeguarded through a more aggressive pursuit and commitment to the ideology of secularism.² This recognition of the fantasy structure as chimera enables him to rupture existing meanings and assumptions. This moment also enables him to explore alternatives outside of these structures of idealisation, projection and defence.

The confrontation and ultimately the rejection of the secular ideal enable Nandy to explore features of Indian political culture that are deemed abject. For example, Nandy explores the possibilities and internal resources of the non-modern peripheral and their capacity for what he terms is a post-secular awareness. This awareness is an internal

² The phrase “traversal of the fantasy” is taken from Ewa Ziarek’s work, though the concept has its foundations within Kristeva’s analysis. For a discussion of both these features see Ewa Ziarek, An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism and the Politics of Radical Democracy, (California: Stanford University Press, 2001.)
capacity within the non-modern peripheral and is also present within Indian culture, though seldom recognised within the official account of Indian political life. In exploring the ways that this awareness can disrupt existing inclusions and exclusions within politics, Nandy furthers his own post-secular commitment. I argue that this post-secular commitment constitutes an alternative account of politics or what can be noted as an alternative or new political imaginary. The dissenting forms of toleration largely grounded within the non-modern religiosity of those deemed peripheral, and cast as bad subjects within secular political culture, reconstitutes existing subjectivities and intersubjective relations. In traversing the fantasy of a western secular ideal, in confronting the viability of statist secularism in safeguarding tolerance, and the ways that alternative accounts of subjectivity are foreclosed by the ideal, Nandy’s position threatens and disrupts the modern markers of politics.

For in confronting the abject in his work, Nandy, according to certain critics, becomes the phobic object, or at least the object of derision and disruption, thus taking on the features of abjection. In critiquing and representing Nandy’s confrontation with secularism, but moreover, his willingness to do so, his own identity is cast and made over as disruptive and threatening. Nandy carries the weight of abjection as that which both fascinates and horrifies with its real and potential threat to disrupt subjectivity. In Kristeva’s account abjection causes a violation to the subject by, “blurring the borders of oneself, pushing one towards psychosis where the all-too-real undermines the divisions between self and other and the capacity to differentiate.”[^3] This is the discursive burden that Nandy carries forward in the debates on secularism, as that which threatens subjectivity, meaning and thus signification. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) Kristeva documents at length our profound unwillingness to confront abjection. As she reminds us, “In short, who I ask you, would agree to call himself abject, subject of or subject to abjection?”[^4] Nandy in reflexive moments acknowledges the unpopularity of his critique and attempts from critics to silence him or render his work and subjectivity irrelevant, but he does not concede to these representations of abjection. Rather what I argue in this chapter is that in maintaining the integrity of his commitment to psychoanalytic confrontation as a method of critique that enables Nandy through these processes to confront the boundaries of inclusion and

exclusion, operating in politics. As he explains, “not only must politics work with – and work out – the contradictions in human subjectivity, [but] that subjectivity in turn concretises, perhaps better than any action, the state of politics in a society.”

The argument continues around Nandy’s willingness to confront those areas of Indian life – ambiguities, contradictions in human subjectivity and within Indian traditions and culture that remain threatening and destabilising to an Indian secular political culture. This task of willing confrontation for Nandy extends to confronting parts of his own self, in order to generate his approach and maintain his commitment to confrontation and a psychoanalytic working through. In doing so, I argue that Nandy’s critique rejects the ontological security of certitudes in favour of a more ambivalent positioning of the boundaries of selfhood and politics. The features of his willing confrontation are considered in two replies Nandy makes to critics, Achin Vanaik and Kuldip Nayar.6 These replies provide insight into the features of confrontation, the reflexivity and receptiveness that result from these processes. These replies to critics also strengthen the argument regarding the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work; namely, his commitment to confrontation and a working through. It is also important to note that these responses are uncharacteristic, given Nandy’s notable reticence to enter into existing academic debates and in responding purely to academic voices.7 He reflects on his decision to reply to these two critics in the following way: “you see even if Kuldip Nayar and Achin Vanaik have not said something substantial the fact remains that their words count because they are fighting the battles in India, because they are writing in India, so you know I would like to respond to them.”8

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8 As Nandy states, “You know I never respond to purely academic critics. I respond only to those who are involved in movements or who are doing something in India or in South Asia in general.” Christine Deftereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session V.” (2006): 2.
9 Christine Deftereos, Ibid., 5. In another interview this point is made with equal force when he states that, “To me it matters what Achin Vanaik says. To me it matters because it has something to do with the future in this part of the world.” See also Christine Deftereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session III,” (Unpublished Interviews, New Delhi, India, 2005): 27.
In what are Nandy’s only official responses to critics, confrontation is clarified further as is his ability to confront, work through and reflect on parts of his own identity as critic, as features of his approach to critique. Confronting and working through the complexities of the secular ideal and position in defining Indian politics and political culture, Nandy comes face to face with a number of resistances and deeply imbedded defences. While these defences may function as a protective structure against the threat of the loss of ontological security, this only works to consolidate existing and dominant processes of inclusion and exclusion. In Nandy’s responses to critics these resistances and defences are radically confronted, worked through and reflected upon in order to generate a broader conceptualisation of politics. In disrupting the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operating in politics he builds a case for the necessity of democratic pluralism. This as he notes is “always helpful even if it is crude, impractical or wrong.”9 For in Nandy’s analysis acknowledging and facilitating pluralism and diversity within politics leads us towards an equally important possibility. This possibility is described as the inclusion of a post-secular awareness within a regenerated conceptualisation of politics. This new and alternative political imaginary though remains radically threatening and disrupting, because of its invitation “for seeing difference as an ontological possibility for subjectivity.”10

6.1 A Personal Statement on the Threat of Indian Democracy

In “Closing the Debate on Secularism: A Personal Statement” written in 2002 Nandy provides a response to the criticisms levelled at him by Achin Vanaik.11 The essay written in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots of 2002 provides the setting for the reiteration of Nandy’s critique of secularism. Within the context of this outbreak of horrific political violence, Nandy re-affirms the need to confront the reality about the ideology of secularism in India. He argues that the atrocities witnessed at Gujarat “should make us openly admit what we all secretly know but cannot publicly acknowledge.”12 At this moment of forced engagement, there is for Nandy an invitation

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11 Achin Vanaik’s criticisms of Nandy’s analysis have bee detailed in Chapter Four, Ashis Nandy as Phobic Object and Abjection: The Conceptual Battleground of Anti-Secularism and Culturalism.
available to confront a secret. The secret that cannot be revealed is the inability of secularism to safeguard tolerance and address social and political amity. Nandy questions whether the ideology of secularism contains the internal resources to address the threat of militancy, xenophobia and fanaticism in India. What is interesting about his acknowledgement of this secret is that this knowledge about secularism is known but unable to be communicated in public life. Gabriel Schwab, in a different context has argued that when this knowledge operates as a national secret then “it becomes a tacit knowledge, shared by everyone yet treated like a taboo subject.” Consistent with this public disavowal or repression Schwab confirms Nandy’s experiences, in noting that it is not surprising that “people who bring it to the surface are often treated with passionate hostility as if they threatened a fragile sense of balance.” This is the case with Nandy whose efforts to confront and expose this national secret position him and his work as threatening and disruptive.

Nandy sets himself the task in the essay of further understanding the inability to publicly acknowledge the problems of secularism. This takes us back, he says “to square one,” to the birth of the independent Indian modern secular state. The other point is to challenge representations of the Gujarat riots as an aberration, by detailing the political conditions that have given rise to the violence. For Nandy, there is continuity between the current outbreaks of violence in contemporary India, especially the events at Gujarat with the Partition riots of 1946-48. According to Nandy this continuity is evident in the way in which the violence took place, first originating in cities and then spreading to villages across Northern India. What also bears resemblance is the way the Gujarat riots, like the riots of Partition were supported by an official discourse of hatred. Acknowledging the continuation of this discourse of hatred, namely between Muslim and Hindu communities, is nonetheless a confronting proposition. Nandy continues his willing confrontation by exposing these issues and also reflecting on the difficulties of confrontation. The personal statement that emerges in the essay is a reflective account of why, for Nandy, confrontation is vital in the production of critique. The additional personal statement that he makes is to continue to challenge and confront the resistances, the fantasies and defences, which prevent this national secret from being

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13 For a discussion of the ways in which these national secrets operate in similar ways, though in the different context of post-war Germany see Gabrielle Schwab, “Haunting Legacies: Trauma in Children of Perpetrators” Postcolonial Studies, 7(2) (2004): 186.
14 Gabrielle Schwab, Ibid., 186.
publicly acknowledged. That Nandy labels this account as a “personal statement” is also significant. If for instance the position of the secret cannot be publicly acknowledged because it is a public secret, then to what extent does the “personal” realm emerge as a response? It is also interesting to note to what extent Nandy uses the “personal” to counter the way his voice and identity as critic has been cast as threatening and disruptive. It can also be read as a play on the private and public divide, or the inner and outer division, which his critique problematises.

While Nandy’s own doubts about the efficacy and sustainability of secularism have been met with suspicion, he argues that secularism’s “decline” is also substantiated by empirical evidence.\(^{16}\) In consulting empirical evidence he confirms that for the first three decades of Independent India the record of secularism could not be disputed. The ideology of secularism did have an important role to play in establishing the independent post-colonial Indian nation state. However, in contemporary India an analysis of the role of secularism, including debating just what this role should be, has been foreclosed. What is “strange” he tells us is that when he first raised doubts about secularism twenty five years ago in an “An Anti-Secular Manifesto,” his position was “already a cliché among activists and scholar-activists.”\(^{17}\) Nandy makes the argument that those who were involved directly in political and social movements already understood the issues raised in his essay. There was he continues, an existing consensus regarding the “bad health” of secularism that cut across political and intellectual ideological boundaries.\(^{18}\) According to Nandy it is important to acknowledge that there was a prior recognition of these issues, but which at a certain point have become foreclosed by the continuing defence of the secular ideal.

The other concern that Nandy addresses in the essay is why this confrontation with the secular ideal, and the fantasy structure that accompanies its continuing defence, cannot be aired in public. Particularly, given that those working on the ground have already aired this in public. That this consensus cannot be publicly acknowledged after all this time, and during the period of post-Gujarat national reflection, becomes all the more arresting. There is a deeply imbedded defence mechanism at play, which for Nandy operates on individual and collective levels and across the private and public realms. The defence that operates blocks the possibility for confrontation, let alone a

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\(^{17}\) Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.

\(^{18}\) Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
willing confrontation that he enters into. According to Nandy the differences of opinion that do exist amongst activists, public intellectuals, between the main political parties and even within the academic debates which have ensued, are more lateral in their focus. A greater emphasis is given to explaining the reasons and responses to this decline in the faith of secularism rather than confronting the psychological viability of the ideal itself. As he notes “few have cared to argue or examine the issue of political cultural sustainability, which I thought would be of interest to even dedicated secularists.” This creates a characteristic limitation within the range of ideas and positions expressed in debate, creating in effect homogeneity in the dissenting viewpoints expressed.

The confrontation that Nandy willingly enters into is largely absent from these debates, as he distinguishes himself from other approaches and contributions. What characterises Nandy’s contributions to these debates is this capacity to willingly confront the ideology of secularism and furthermore, in publicly acknowledging the necessity for confrontation. Articulated as a personal statement, he recognises that it is “obviously an unpopular stance; it smacks of class-betrayal.” Nandy defines confrontation as a form of betrayal in turning against one’s class, and to this extent as a turning against parts of self. Why though is Nandy able to enter into this betrayal that distinguishes him, and turn against his class in this way? He does not directly answer this question in this essay, though the indirect response is to be found in his analysis of why others are unable to follow through with the task of confrontation. In the case of critics, Nandy argues that their own inability to acknowledge this position, along with their condemnation of his willingness to do so, can be explained with the following: “because they have to fight it within themselves these conclusions they have drawn, [and] they feel disturbed, guilty and complicit when someone else brings them to the

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20 For instance, Nandy confronts the range of dissenting views that are even possible within this intellectual culture as a result of this limitation. “There is,” he tells us “little difference on the subject between Asghar Ali Engineer and Lal Krishna Advani, T.N. Madan and Achin Vanaik or, for that matter, between the functionaries of India’s main political parties.” Ashis Nandy, “Closing The Debate On Secularism,” (2002): 2.

21 I am not suggesting that Nandy is alone in his confrontation with secularism, but that this willingness for confrontation is significant for understanding his contributions to debating secularism. I theorise Nandy’s capacity for confrontation, and more importantly how he is able to achieve this in the following chapter. See Chapter 7, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention.

fore.” The connection established here between an inner and outer confrontation is important for understanding the way the “secret” about secularism is reinforced through a private (inside) and public (outside) border.

The personal and public threat is projected onto Nandy, whose own willing confrontation and betrayal must be defended against. These defences and projections are for Nandy part of more complex and deeper resistances to an analysis of these issues. The resistances prevent these issues from being publicly acknowledged and also demonstrate an inability to “work through” the cultural and psychic resistances that otherwise block an appreciation of the damage and distortions that the ideology of secularism has entailed. He suggests that this inability to work through is exemplified by theorists like Mukul Kesavan, who in order to protect his familiar world “stretches the meaning of secularism to include in it all forms of non-communal attitudes.” For Nandy figures like Kesavan and to this he adds Achin Vanaik, these defences, including their defence against him, “act as forms of exorcism.” For Nandy though, this “exorcism,” this outlet of expression ultimately does not work through the threat and anxiety that remains, as a continuing feature of defending secularism. In continuing to recognise that secularism is a withered concept, even if this is in private, whilst maintaining a public commitment to the ideology, generates enough internal conflict and anxiety of its own accord. The process of internalisation, that maintains the disjuncture between tacit knowledge and public knowledge, generates enough discontent, irrespective of whether this is then projected onto the phobic object. As Nandy maintains, this internal conflict is a dynamic that continues on its own accord irrespective of the presence of the phobic object in these debates. As Nandy states, “that

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23 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 3.
24 In the following chapter I theorise this resistance further as a resistance to psychoanalysis and moreover, to the psychoanalytic concept of “working through” that is central to Nandy’s confrontation. These processes that Nandy enters into to generate social and political criticism are characterised as features of the psychoanalytic mode operating in his work and his identity as critic. See Chapter 7, Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention.
25 Ashis Nandy, “Closing The Debate On Secularism,” (2002): 10. See also Kesavan’s text where he makes a number of interesting claims by imbuing the concept of secularism with what he argues is a historicity that is peculiar to India. This is a broad concept of secularism which he defines as ‘anti-hegemonic, pluralist and all inclusive. These qualities are for Nandy peculiar not to secularism, but to the diversity within the Indic civilisation with its many traditions of toleration and cultures of religiosity. Mukul Kesavan, Secular Common Sense, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001).
they know what they do not want to know and fight against this,” only perpetuates these defensive “counter-phobic” attitudes.27

The anxiety that defines these internal dynamics is connected to a larger external issue. One that Nandy concedes has little to do with his own intellectual position or even his status as the threatening and disruptive figure in these debates. The complexity of these internal defences (internal to both self and nation) needs to be conceptualised within the larger threat that Indian democracy presents. For concepts of democratic pluralism along with democratic processes also threaten these precarious cultural and psychic structures of defence. Moreover, what is expressed, as a fear of democracy or a fear of the people is highly disruptive because it threatens the inclusions and exclusions that operate in Indian political culture. For Nandy the homogenising and standardising features of the secular ideal are confronted by democratic pluralism. In his account the threat of pluralism is not unique to Indian Democracy but symptomatic of a “fear of democracy underlining democratic culture itself.”28 For Nandy this fear is a feature of all modern liberal democracies. In the work of the political theorist Chantal Mouffe this fear is described through what she terms is the “democratic paradox.”29 In Mouffe’s analysis in The Democratic Paradox (2000) she argues that this paradox ensures the continuation of these tensions as an antagonistic feature of politics. The idea that this fear can also be understood as part of a paradox that exists within all liberal democratic societies is useful because it denotes a continuing dynamic that can not be necessarily resolved.Whilst at least in Mouffe’s work this antagonism is critiqued in favour of an agonistic account of politics, these are important dynamics for politics.30 Mouffe argues that by denying the existence of partisan adversarial interests based on collective identities, modern liberalism has foreclosed the symbolic space for such conflicts to occur.31

In Nandy’s account this antagonism is evident in the ways in which the symbolic space of debating secularism has been truncated, and its distortions threaten to compromise democratic pluralism and democratic processes. This takes place alongside that fact that democratic processes have expanded representation in Indian politics, as excluded peripheral and abjected voices are finding a place in politics. Over the last twenty years political representation has expanded significantly and the secular state has been increasingly unable to screen those entering politics for their commitment to the secular ideal. For Nandy, this has the effect of regenerating democratic pluralism given that these processes have placed distinct limits on secularisation within India. Nandy’s questioning continues as he asks: “And in a democracy what kinds of rights do you grant to ordinary citizens?” Such questions must be seriously addressed if the democratic paradox is to be worked through. This paradox and its accompanying features of antagonism, for Nandy create the possibility for a working through to take place, and in the process challenge established inclusions and exclusions operating in politics. As he explains in support of a concept of antagonism in politics, “in some fundamental sense this combination of the ability to tolerate and live with enormous diversities, and simultaneously use an open political system to change or alter existing intra-communal social relations, existing social relations and hierarchies has been the real clue to the success of democracy and the democratic experiment in India.”

The success of the democratic experiment in the world’s largest democracy is contingent though, like in all liberal democracy’s, on its own internal capacities and resources to negotiate this paradox. In Mouffe’s account of the democratic paradox and in Nandy’s analysis of the Indian context this process of negotiation is always a complex task. As Mouffe explains, it is not just a question of abandoning a political ideal, for “pluralism also means the end of a substantive idea of the good life, what

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23 Nandy adds to this with “now that secularisation of the Indian polity has gone far, the scope of secularism as a creed has declined.” There is in his analysis another paradox that is identifiable. He explores this as part of what he terms the secular paradox, that secularism as an ideology can only thrive in a society which is predominantly non-secular and that when the dynamics of that society begin to change through secularisation, then the political status of secularism changes. See “Twilight of Certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism and Other Masks of Deculturation,” in Ashis Nandy, Bonfire of Creeds, (2004): 109.
Claude Lefort calls ‘the dissolution of the markers of certainty.’ Nandy too recognises the complexity of these processes in confronting, working through and abandoning the secular ideal. However, in his account the distortions of the ideology already represent secularism as being at the twilight of certitudes. Whilst the cultural and psychological viability of secularism is dubious, as Mouffe affirms the “recognition of pluralism implies a profound transformation in the symbolic ordering of social relations.” Nandy, like Mouffe recognises the possibility carried forward within concepts of democratic pluralism to disrupt the borders of inclusion and exclusion in Indian political culture and to transform these relations.

Despite the emphasis Nandy places on the ways democratic processes confront and destabilise the markers of certainty, the threat of democracy, as a fear of the people remains. People though do bring into politics a range of peculiarities, ambiguities, contradictions, competing ethical systems, including views and knowledge systems considered non-modern. For Nandy, pluralism of this kind also expressed through different accounts of subjectivity and of Indianness and carries forward the possibility of radically destabilising inclusions and exclusions in political culture. These threats play out within Indian political culture and amongst intellectuals debating these issues, as an inability to accept ambivalence and pluralism. The defensive response to these threats, as demonstrated in the Hindu nationalist movement, is to contain and abject ambivalence and pluralism. As Nandy explains, “a lot of people have wanted democracy but also wanted the people to democratically choose what they want them to choose!” This attempt to foreclose the dynamism of democratic processes and contain the uncertainty of the paradox finds expression in two dominant political assumptions. These assumptions also work to affirm established boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operating in politics. The first assumption operating in defence of this view is that those who do not speak the language of secularism are unfit for citizenship. Thus from this perspective there is a need to re-affirm that which must be abjected, excluded

39 For a discussion of these processes refer to Chapter 3 Ambivalence and Contradiction: Containing Concepts of Indianness.
40 He continues that “this is not an Indian experience only this is the global experience with democracy since the nineteenth century.” Christine Deettereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session IV,” (2005): 2.
and prohibited from politics. The second assumption that follows is that those who do speak the language of state secularism have “the sole right to determine what true democratic principles, governance and religious tolerance are.” However, for Nandy to accept democratic pluralism, including the paradox of democracy, is to recognise that the disruptive interests, preferences and choices of the non-modern peripherals are part of politics. This for Nandy is connected to recognising the subjectivity of the non-modern peripheral as political, and not in exclusionary terms to cast them as Seyla Benhabib’s work has pointed out, as pre-political subjects.

Nandy concedes that recognising the non-modern peripheral as a political subject, and as central to working through the democratic paradox, is confronting. In his reading this is complicated further by the fact that “they [the secularists] want India to be diverse but only as long as that diversity is subservient to Modernity.” The defensive logic that prevails is intimately tied to the modern features of Indian political culture and to a modern self, a modern Indianess that is fiercely protected. To challenge and confront these constitutive features is radically destabilising on both national and on personal levels as a dominant and preferred self-understanding and self-representation is threatened. Nandy explains the threat of confrontation in the following way. He states “…that such knowledge might lead to large-scale displacement or uprooting in the domain of intellectual work, that the familiar world of knowing might shrink, if not collapse and, in the new world that may come into being, there would be less space for the likes of us.” What will be my place in a non-secular or non-modern world? Nandy rhetorically asks mimicking the voices of “India’s newly empowered urban middle class [who] just cannot conceive of a good society without its ideas and itself at the helm.” Consistent with the ego-defence at play, there is a narcissistic feature to this defence. For protecting and defending against the ontological threat of disrupting and boundaries of subjectivity is the role of the ego. Nandy argues that this powerful psychic

42 In Seyla Benhabib’s work this recognition of difference within subjectivity is imperative to the democratic deliberative politics she is interested in advancing. For a discussion of this refer to Noelle McAfee’s discussion of her efforts in the chapter “Complimentary Agency” in McAfee, Noelle, Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2000). See also Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics, (New York: Routledge, 1992); Seyla Benhabib, ed. Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
45 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 3.
investment in the defensive structure, protecting a dominant account of self, is analogous to Freud’s account of the inescapable human fantasy of immortality. This fantasy is governed by a narcissistic ego exclaiming, “will and more importantly can life continue after my death?” For Nandy there is a similar narcissistic fantasy structure operating in the defence of the secular ideal operating within Indian political culture and in the intellectual culture that theorists like Achin Vanaik, seek to preserve.

Thus far what is discernable from Nandy’s reply to Achin Vanaik is that confrontation takes place on a number of different levels in his work. This includes a willingness to confront the secular ideal and the complicity of this ideal in the violence at Gujarat. Confrontation is explained as a personal statement as Nandy enters into a confrontation with aspects of his self, including the expectations of his class. Confrontation also takes place in working through the fear of democratic pluralism and the democratic paradox that underpins all modern liberal democracies. Nandy’s own reflections of these confrontations indicate that this takes place as something more than autonomy of thought. For these processes of confrontation and working through complex individual and collective defences, are central to Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach to generating social and political criticism. Confrontation and working through reference processes that enable the defence to be identified and explored in order to reveal what is being covered over by the defence. There are strong affinities between working through in a psychoanalytic therapy and the way Nandy works through the cultural and psychic resistances within self and society, that otherwise block an appreciation of the damage and distortions that the ideology of the Indian secular state has entailed. The discussion continues as to how this takes place in Nandy’s “personal statement” to Achin Vanaik.

6.2 The Return of the Symptomatic Again?

The prevailing threat that democratic pluralism continues to represent is evident in the four different possible diagnostic features given for secularism’s ill health and decline. For Nandy rather than confronting and working through this decline, a series of diagnoses and rationalisations emerge. The first diagnosis is from the Hindu nationalists who claim that secularism’s decline is due to the political appeasement of minority
interests, particularly from the Gandhians on the Left. This reactionary attitude against ambivalence, difference and pluralism emanates from a perceived internalised wound or discrimination, which such nationalists claim Hindus have experienced. They carry forward a belief that secularism of the kind demonstrated within Indian politics has been biased against Hindus. The reaction in simplified terms then finds expression in militant calls for genuine secularism as opposed to the pseudo-secularism they claim has been witnessed in India. For Nandy, “the policies and actions of the Hindu nationalists may often have not been secular, but a part of their soul has always been.”

Cast again as an internal question the complexities of this political subjectivity have been discussed in relation to the zealot, who epitomises the self-loathing projected towards one’s disavowed cultural self, along with a more generalised hatred and fear of difference.

The second diagnosis offered is that secularism given half the chance, that is, if governed and nurtured by the right kind of people would still prosper. This solution is for Nandy “offered by the loveable innocents,” whose innocence is preserved by the fantasy of the secular ideal. For these innocents “heavier doses of the same medicine, is the only possible remedy for the ailment called religious violence.” In addition to the fantasy that secularism remains the solution to inter-religious tolerance and amity is that the violence witnessed is definable by its religious and not political characteristics. Nandy contradicts this in arguing that this violence is not a symptom of a non-modern, regressive, traditional and religious India.

The third response is an extension of this diagnosis by those who maintain that the Indian State has never been entirely secular and policies of appeasement demonstrated towards minorities have prevented this ideal from being realised. According to this view the state has made a series of consistent concessions starting with political slogans

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47 Nandy references a number of reforms introduced into Hindu society after Independence including the Hindu Code Bill which has never been attempted against other religions. Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 3.
49 According to Nandy theorists supporting this position include the historian Mushirul Hasan, the sociologist Dinpankar Gupta and journalist Praful Bidwani. See Ashis Nandy, “Closing The Debate On Secularism” (2002): 5.
50 This position has been detailed in the first two chapters of the dissertation. See Part A, *The Pathologies of Secularism*.
51 This is linked to the fear of the divisiveness of minorities and the diversity which religious and ethnic plurality introduces into a nation state. “Therefore all religions and ethnic divisions become hurdles to nation building and state formation, and as dangers to the technology of statecraft and political management.” Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Passes in Indian Politics and Religion* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 84.
of “equal respect for all religions” or “sarva-dharma-samabhava.” The remedy is in a tough dose of western style secular tolerance. Nandy alludes to wanting to be sympathetic to such a response, for he recognises this as an easier option, but in having confronted the abject and traversed the fantasy, he is unable to return to this position. For behind the compliance to this fantasy of security provided by the secular state are deeper attachments to the ideological formation of the nation state. Nandy states, “the kind of agency and coherence often imputed to these impersonal entities [the State] is usually a projection of our inner needs and anthropomorphic fantasies of a parental state; such feel good attributions are a tribute to our trusting nature rather than to political acumen.”

This psychic investment in the state and state apparatuses creates a dependency and attachment that Nandy questions and ultimately, is unwilling to accept. Moreover, this trusting nature or “blind faith” that secularism demands and that secures attachments to the state is theorised by Nandy as constituting a dangerous psychic state. Nandy describes this attachment by using what the psychologist Rollo May defines as a psychic state of “pseudo-innocence.” The illusion established by this trusting nature and its conditions can be explained through May’s concept of “pseudo-innocence.” In May’s work this references a narcissistic defence that takes one back, psychologically speaking to an infantile psychic state. For May, it is a childlike naivety, riddled with insecurity that covers over the possibility of confronting questions too provocative or horrendous for the self to contemplate. The defence takes over to protect the self to preserve an existing psychic state. As May explains, “we tend to shrink into this kind of innocence and make a virtue of powerlessness, weakness and helplessness.” In Nandy’s critique applying this concept of “pseudo innocence” to understand the defence of secularism, alerts us to the dangers of this position. For it validates a fantasy structure, and a concept of a helpless self, that forecloses the impetus to confront perceived and real dangers to selfhood. For “it is this innocence that cannot come to

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52 These are points of difference between “positive secularism versus pseudo-secularism” have been used by the Hindu Right in India, such as the Shiv Sena Party and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). For a discussion of these issues see Brenda Crossman and Ratna Kapur, “Secularism: Bench-Marched by Hindu Right,” Economic and Political Weekly, (31) (38) (21 September 1996): 2613-2630.


55 Rollo May, Ibid., 49
terms with the destructiveness in one’s self or others…that becomes self-destructive.”

In Nandy’s analysis, it is a “pseudo-innocence” that underpins the defence of state secularism and that state secularism can safeguard tolerance and amity in India. To support this position and to continue to defend it is therefore, to fall back into a psychic state of pseudo-innocence. It represents a deferral of power to an external ideal, which continues to prove ineffectual in politics but also does so at the expense of our individual and collective capacities to negotiate subjectivity, including our own. This psychic position is a stark contrast to the more creative possibility of an “authentic innocence” that May distinguishes in his work. In contrast to the concept of “pseudo-innocence” this “authentic innocence” is for May, a different psychic state that relies not on a fantasy structure but a dynamic interplay between parts of self. It is this latter expression of innocence that Nandy advocates as creative and a more complex form of psychic organisation, central to a dynamic account of subjectivity.

The final diagnosis offered for the decline in secularism comes from the part of society that does acknowledge that Indian experiences of secularism cannot be those of Europe’s. Nandy suggests that this is a “post-secular awareness” that enters into the debates. More significantly, this awareness emerges though from having worked through the realities of the democratic paradox, rather than maintaining fantasies of Indian democracy and Indian political culture, along with the experiences of democratic pluralism. This awareness acknowledges the presence of alternative subjectivities, including aspects of Indian selfhood or a cultural self, abjected by a secular ideology. Therefore, according to this view the ideology of secularism can only have a superficial presence in Indian politics and political culture. Affording secularism a superficial status in Indian democracy though would entail an acceptance that pluralism and diversity within a democracy includes all kinds of citizens. This final diagnosis remains threatening and disruptive because it challenges existing structures of inclusion and exclusion in politics. As Nandy explains, “if you allow me the right to my own cliché, these are societies that enjoy the luxury of electing their political leaders periodically but alas, to the chagrin of their progressive academics, not the right to elect their

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56 Rollo May, Ibid., 49
people.” For Nandy such a perspective maintains a position that relies on what Mouffe describes is “the typical illusion of pluralism without antagonism.”

In the final parts of the article Nandy reflects on the intellectual culture and his positioning within it. He notes that within such a defensive culture his own contributions to debate cannot be accepted as a constructive contribution, given that it is predicated upon a confrontation of these very defences. Is this the symptomatic register foreclosing the possibilities of confrontation and working through? Nandy’s position is nonetheless unequivocally made despite its perceived value to the debates. He notes, “I have given a pathologist’s report and declared the patient incurable.” This is a diagnosis and intellectual position that has been arrived out through a serious and complex confrontation with the secular ideal, despite critics’ assertions otherwise. More importantly, it is not he qualifies a plea for “euthanasia.” For Nandy the time has come to “give up on the patient and look towards a new generation of concepts.”

What distinguishes his confrontation from other theorists is that this confrontation, rejection and traversal of the secular ideal are as he describes also executed “with a touch of glee, without obediently shedding tears for secularism.” According to Nandy, Vanaik “the Sikh Samurai never lost for words” has wasted his breath in his efforts to redress Nandy’s confrontation. Nandy thus maintains the integrity of his commitment to confrontation through his formal reply to Vanaik. This though does not prevent him from acknowledging the difficulties of this position. For as he states, “I am perfectly willing to accept that this alternative might be second-rate.” He cautions that is not because he believes that people deserve a second rate solution. Rather it is because living in a democracy and in working through and living with the democratic paradox, “we have no option but to build upon the second-rate that the majority prefers.”

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63 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 7.
64 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 7.
65 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 7.
66 See Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 7. Here I am distinguishing Nandy from theorists like T.N.Madan and Partha Chatterjee and other anti-secular voices on the basis of his willingness to confront and work through the secular ideal in this way, through a psychoanalytic approach. There would be value in exploring the points of difference between the critiques of secularism offered by Nandy, Chatterjee and Madan, further.
67 Nandy acknowledges critics’ dissatisfaction with him when he states that, “critics have reasons to be bitter that I do not want to save my skin under their expert guidance, by declaring my allegiance to the textbooks and ritual the benevolent guides have borrowed for my benefit from Europe’s past.” Ashis Nandy, “Closing The Debate On Secularism,” (2002): 8.
68 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 8.
inability of critics to accept his position is all the more arresting given that “studies of resistance at the ground level” repeatedly confirm his view.\(^6^9\)

Nandy identifies three irreconcilable contradictions that he argues need to at least be recognised, even if critics are not prepared to confront and traverse the sanctity of the secular ideal within these debates. Firstly, if the boundaries between religion and politics are so easily distinguishable then why do secular Indians invoke the non-secular into concepts of selfhood? Why for instance, is a political figure like Nehru only remembered and celebrated as the ideal secular statesman, when his own identity and political personality is far more complex? “Many [Nandy included] have been forced to search for new heroes who would make some sense to ordinary citizens.”\(^7^0\) The second contradiction that remains unresolved is in response to the boundaries defining the debates of secularism. To defend the secular position is as he suggests a destructive form of innocence not least because critique and debate, and the normative boundaries of debate are not confronted. He asserts that, “secularism has become the last refuge of the intellectually lazy, of those who refuse to confront the logic of their own political and cultural choices.”\(^7^1\) The deferral to a defensive and persecutory logic reinforces the internal resistances to an analysis of these issues within this intellectual culture. The third and final contradiction is that in confronting secularism as a sterile source of social creativity, he enters into a critical and psychoanalytic engagement with these secular icons and ideal types. In not being invested in the defence of secularism, “by doing so, I believe that I have taken the secularists more seriously than they have done themselves.”\(^7^2\) This provides Nandy with the conditions to explore the peripheral and creative forms of resistance, which continue to exist within India, against the pathologies of state secularism.\(^7^3\) In defence of his own position and by way of expanding on the features of his confrontation, he says the following about his approach. “I have built on what creative, successful resistance against such pathologies

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\(^6^9\) “It is not my fault,” he confronts “that these secularists fear their own data and experiences.” For even the most avowed secularists produce this data, of which Nandy states, Asghar Ali Engineer typifies this fear ‘of not wanting to know.’ See Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 9. See also Engineer, Asghar Ali eds., *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984). Paul R. Brass and Achin Vanaik, eds., *Competing Nationalisms in South Asia: Essays for Asghar Ali Engineer*, (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2002).


has done and said it has done over the centuries, rather than on the ideological baggage secular fundamentalists have thrust on it.”

Nandy’s intellectual commitment continues around developing the resistances and human potentiality to be found in Indian democracy and within post-secular forms of awareness. This commitment continues alongside the recognition that in the culture of democracy his efforts remain threatening and disruptive. Irrespective of this threat, Nandy’s own resistance, defiance and confrontation are unrelenting and consistently affirmed in the essay. He maintains his “…vague, anxious suspicion that much of the citizenry might not need vanguards, experts in multiculturalism, or ideologically-drive, politically correct, Orwellian thought police.” Where this personal statement to Achin Vanaik addresses the threat of democratic pluralism, operating at the threshold of Indian politics, Nandy’s reply to Kuldip Nayar directly responds to the fear of a post-secular awareness that operates in Indian political culture.

### 6.3 Traversing the Fear of the Post-Secular

Having confronted the threat posed by democratic pluralism in his response to Achin Vanaik, Nandy turns to explore the fear of post-secular forms of awareness. Written in 2005, three years after his reply to Vanaik, the article “The Return of the Sacred: Post-Secular Reflections on the Language of Religion and the Fear of Democracy” responds to Kuldip Nayar’s criticisms levelled at him in the 2004 exchange, and functions as a platform for re-affirming his commitment to confrontation. Nandy revisits the question of the psychological viability of secularism in an age where religion returns in Indian politics now in a pathological form. Religion he tells us, “…has re-emerged at the end of what could only be called an age of ideologies, not in its pristine form but bearing the imprint of the age of secular ideologies.” In Nandy’s analysis religion returns in politics carrying the wounds of the processes of subjection. Nandy argues that since the beginning of the twenty-first

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76 I have already considered Nandy’s brief response to Kuldip Nayar in the previous Chapter. This response written after this initial exchange expands on the integrity of Nandy’s approach to confrontation further.
century and across many democracies “religion has become a phoenix that has risen from its own ashes and now wears the ashes as a sign of its new triumph.”

The reasons for the return of religion and the conditions of return are widely debated. Nandy adds to the reasons in noting that issues like the ills of globalisation, the excesses of consumer society, uncritical individualism, the growth of violence including gratuitous violence, and the decline in the sanctity of life are all relevant factors. In the Indian context though what also bears significance is that a number of modern values held sacrosanct are “loosing their shine” as new forms of dominance and despotism are taking shape. For Nandy this return to religion must similarly be recognised as a response “for the excesses of secularisation during the last one hundred and fifty years in human affairs.”

It is not he disputes, as popular opinion maintains, simply a case of the ethnic backwaters of India advocating this return and who in having remained untouched by the processes of modernisation and secularisation are yet to catch up with a dominant political culture. Even if populist opinion is accepted this does not adequately account for the conditions of this return. Is this return of religion in contemporary Indian political life the reassertion of faith or is it the return of a pathological expression of religion as ideology? In asking these sorts of questions Nandy disrupts what he sees as a facile separation between religion and politics maintained by secularists. In noting that religion returns as re-made political identities, he confronts the political conditions of this return.

The remedy is not with single-key solutions or with perfect institutions and systems. Rather in Nandy’s account the vernacular of political certitudes and the search for ideal solutions is part of the problem. For all world-views, whether one acknowledges the Enlightenment vision or the alternative cosmology of the non-modern peripherals via the sacred and religious, have this capacity for inclusion and exclusion. What does distinguish these non-modern visions of the good life is that this subjectivity has the potential to challenge these divisions. According to Nandy “seemingly these visions convert a part of the drive for power to a drive for power over self, particularly

78 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 1. I have detailed the way in which religion is made over as a political identity in Indian secular culture for Nandy; and moreover, returns, as is the case with Hindu Nationalism, “as a sign of its new triumph” in politics. See the discussion advanced in Chapter 2 and 3. Chapter 2 An Anti-Secular Manifesto? The Cultural and Psychological Viability of Secularism. Chapter 3 Ambivalence and Contradiction: Containing Concepts of Indianness.
79 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
80 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 2.
over the unacceptable parts of one’s self.”81 These non-modern visions of the good life have the effect of creating a confrontation within the self. It is this psychoanalytic focus that is celebrated as the inclusions disrupt these power relations. This is not to say however, that inclusions and exclusions are eradicated but that there is a greater complexity afforded the self in this perspective, and by extension self/other relations. There is a vital recognition and awareness within this internal focus, internal to subjectivity and culture, with what Nandy terms is an isomorphism at play. Elsewhere Nandy has described his use of the concept of isomorphism, crudely speaking as an awareness that “what we do to others we do not only to ourselves but also to our cognitive ventures.”82 This emphasises the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s perspective and the ways that these internal dynamics can restructure subjectivity and inter-subjective relations. The recognition of this dialectic at play in the non-modern peripheral between these outer and inner powers is fundamental to understanding the confrontation Nandy is interested in.

For Nandy the non-modern peripheral carries forward a post-secular awareness present in these alternative non-modern ethical and knowledge systems. This awareness is not present in the return of religion as ideology. For as explored in his critique of secularism, the internal resources and psychic state of the Hindu nationalists or the zealot, is similar to the modern political secularism. The use of violence for political advantage is central to both these groups. Violence in any form, including violence to self, is in Nandy’s account incompatible with the appeal to internal resources that he makes. It is important to note that even when violence is adopted as a political tool, it is still radically disruptive to subjectivity and the boundaries of political culture.83 For violence in its extreme form represents in the most confronting way the collapse of limits; the limits between self and other and the collapse or loss of the sanctity of life. In

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82 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xviii.
Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* (1982) she explains that “of things abject, the corpse is the most abject.”\(^{84}\) Political violence of the kind witnessed in contemporary Indian life, particularly over the last decade, is for Nandy a violation, or the most positively negative sign of the abject functioning. This is a violation to social relations and to self, where total disintegration of subjectivity or abjection is made possible.\(^{85}\) While violence alerts us to the threat of abjection in an immediate and horrifying way, he radically questions whether this violence is attributable to the return of religion. Nandy qualifies though that while religious violence does take place, comparatively it has not caused the loss of life in nearly the same numbers that secular states have been responsible for.\(^{86}\)

The solution that he is interested in developing takes place through yet another confrontation. As he claims, “however uncomfortable the thought might be the intellectual challenge of our times may well be to identify the means- the institutional structures and personality resources – that can reconcile diversity with exclusions that are not radically destructive or driven by hatred.”\(^{87}\) This intellectual commitment to identifying the means (within the self and within Indian culture) to address questions of diversity and pluralism in less destructive terms forms the main argument of the article. Nandy therefore confronts the underside of Indian democracy – the language and cosmology of religion – in order to work through these possibilities.

If one is to have access to “a huge majority of those staying in the God-forsaken parts of the world” then religion cannot be abjected from view.\(^{88}\) Without some minimal contact with this language and cosmology then one is reduced to a spectator of politics in most parts of the southern world. The spectator for Nandy occupies the privileged voice of inclusion and dominance, then bemoans the regressive and irrational choices

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\(^{85}\) Humphrey argues that, “By confronting individuals with the abject, with the victim’s pain and suffering, violence challenges social reality by exposing the void against which cultural meaning is founded.” See Humphrey, Michael, *Ibid.*, 12.

\(^{86}\) Refer to data cited from R.J. Rummel, *Death by Government: Genocide and Mass Murder since 1900*, (West Hanover: Christopher Publishing, 1994). Elsewhere Nandy states referencing this data that, “they seem to suggest that in the last one hundred years, less than five percent of those killed in mass violence have died in religious wars and riots. A little less than eighty per cent have died at the hands of the state, a huge majority of them in the hands of their own states, espousing secular, rational, scientific values.” For a discussion of this question of modernity and violence see Ashis Nandy, and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Talking India* (2006): 71.

\(^{87}\) Nandy also refers to this as a tolerable ethnocentrism which is an inevitable part of a living culture. Ashis Nandy, “The Return Of The Sacred,” (2005): 2.

\(^{88}\) Nandy argues that in places like Latin America, Africa and Asia, people have partial or no access to the language of secularism and citizenship. Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 4.
that the abject and “irresponsible electorates” make.\textsuperscript{89} It is doubtful whether this spectator of politics has the capacity including the internal psychic resources, to recognise and publicly acknowledge this democratic right of every citizen to bring into public life the language or cosmology of their own choosing. Can another ethical framework and knowledge system be tolerated, given that as already discussed “the framework may not satisfy the criteria set up by his or her earnest well wishers”\textsuperscript{90} The confrontation with the abject irresponsible electorates becomes intertwined with a confrontation with an alternative world-view. The message is that once you accept that citizens will bring their own visions of a good life into politics then you cannot as Nandy says attempt to police this. You cannot ensure that the good parts are brought into public life and the bad parts are abjected from public view and democratic political processes. The spirit of accommodation that Kuldip Nayar accuses Nandy of misrecognising within the secular ideal is for Nandy a feature of democratic processes and not as Nayar would believe attributed to the ideology of secularism.

Nandy argues that there are homegrown, hybrid and multiple versions of this spirit of accommodation already present within religious communities. Confronting the fear of the post-secular is to recognise the pluralism and diversity that exists within India. The intrusion and disruption that religion brings, is that it draws political attention to these competing ethical and knowledge systems. Another aspect to this fear of this post-secular is with the ecumenical and the scope of disruption it can cause given that for Nandy “such dialogues of faith can transcend history.”\textsuperscript{91} These anxieties and fears become all the more annihilating, “particularly when combined with the fear and contempt for the people and their worldviews and categories that have constituted the underside of both democratic politics and political radicalism for at least two hundred years in much of the world.”\textsuperscript{92}

The cost of not confronting this underside is that India’s cultural past along with the pluralism of Indian democracy remains unacknowledged and can manifest in pathological form. This cultural past includes distinctive traditions of cosmopolitanism

\textsuperscript{89} The phrase “irresponsible electorates” is originally by Henry Kissinger. Nandy continues his argument with “...Or you could shed copious tears on the rise of fundamentalism and religious and ethnic chauvinism encouraged by those who exercise power on the basis on such disreputable choices.” See Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 4.

\textsuperscript{90} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 4.

\textsuperscript{91} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 6. This disruption to history is explored at length by in Nandy in his essay, Ashis Nandy, “History's Forgotten Doubles” \textit{History and Text} May (34) (1995): 44-66.

and plural accounts of subjective and inter-subjective relations that exist in India and which constitute an all-together different spirit of accommodation.\footnote{This theme has also been developed by Nandy in the essay “Coping with the Politics of Faiths and Cultures: Between Secular State and Ecumenical Traditions in India,” published in J.D Pfaff-Czarnecka and D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, 	extit{Ethnic Futures: The State and Identity Politics in Asia} (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999). For a discussion on cosmopolitanism see “Time Travel to a Possible Self: Searching for the Alternative Cosmopolitanism of Cochin” in Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion}, (2002).} What are at stake are these alternative political imaginaries that exist within India’s cultural pasts.\footnote{An interesting example of this effort to preserve these alternative political imaginaries is developed in Nandy’s essays collected in 	extit{An Ambiguous Journey to the City}. Here he links the return to the village from the city as often a search for alternative cosmopolitanism and that, “that cosmopolitanism has a place for the humble vernacular, often incompatible with any iconography of the nation state, with the compulsions of the global market, and with the demands of a global knowledge industry.” Ashis Nandy, 	extit{An Ambiguous Journey to the City: the village and other odd ruins of the self in the Indian imagination} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003): ix.} Nandy notes, “human beings have invested some of their best cognitive and affective resources in the spiritual and the religious.”\footnote{Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 8.} He is again willing to acknowledge, but not to accept the fear and threat that accompanies this creative post-secular awareness as an alternative political imaginary, and the need to defend against this possibility of disruption to an existing political imaginary with what he terms is a principled forgetting. Given his confrontation, this remains a source of tension in people’s willingness to forget the secular world’s capacity to endorse evil, yet retain their fear of religion in any form and its capacity to endorse evil. As he states, “civilization, as we know it, is largely the achievement of the religious way of life, though we try hard to forget that part of the story.”\footnote{Ashis Nandy, “The Return Of The Sacred,” (2005): 8.} In continuing to submit to the repression and processes of disavowal at play then “how” he asks, “can we acknowledge the achievements of a part of our self that the Enlightenment vision has declared a terra incognita?”\footnote{Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 8.

\footnote{Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 9.}

The other confrontation Nandy brings to Nayar’s criticisms is in recognising the internal built-in contradiction to his own argument. While he continues to build a case for understanding the religious worldview as “a means of entering popular consciousness and the normative frames that shape the democratic process,” his account equally recognises the ambivalence this leaves in its wake.\footnote{Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 9.} Though arguably not threatened by the possibility, which this ambivalence brings in regenerating the boundaries of the political, Nandy does concede that, “…it remains an open question how far this worldview and normative frames directly shape democratic choices and...
how far they are mediated or altered by the packaged interpretations of religion floating around in the public sphere. This open question for Nandy does not justify the reproduction of these defensive and narcissistic structures. For learning to live with difference, ambiguity and contradiction is essential to the complexities of human subjectivity and in our capacity to extend a hand to the other. Similarly, a more fluid and ambivalent interpretation of religion is offered, which he suggests carries forward an awareness of these complexities, thus displacing a dominant concept of religion as ideology from the political. In re-invoking a key Gandhian tenet, this entails a confrontation with high versus low accounts of religiosity, particularly against what he argues is the re-brahminisation of belief. It is what he terms the low brow, folksy and non-canonical accounts imbedded in everyday vernacular and practices that challenge the lack of the spirit of accommodation present in politics. Yet while this intellectual culture perceives this as an embarrassing challenge, for Nandy it is in bypassing this very division between high/low, which can lead to a regeneration of meaning. This process can lead to a reconfiguration of selfhood and to a cognitive and political space of human sensitivity. As he explains,

...The real challenge is to bypass this division and discover the frames of sensitivity within which the respect for – and celebration of – the unthinking casual, everyday forms of religiosity converge with serious scholarly visions of a sacralized cosmos and sanctity of life. Let me call it the first step towards a post-secular social and political awareness.

This is an analogous plea to what Mouffe identifies is the need for democracy to become dialogic, in order to actuate this possibility for human sensitivity in the politics. This coincides with her call for a life politics capable of confronting and incorporating a “democracy of emotions” into its repertoire. In Nandy’s rendition the dialogic feature of democracy would facilitate the incorporation of diversity, including

99 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 9.
103 Chantal Mouffe, Ibid., 15.
post-secular frames of sensitivity and awareness into political culture. This post-secular awareness as highlighted carries forward a disruptive element, none the least because of its emphasis on the internal aspects of self and culture. It implies an altogether different internal reflexivity for the self and within a culture, in which the possibility of transforming the boundaries between self and other, public and private, secular and non-secular are re-affirmed. Re-claiming this possibility is central to Nandy’s argument and arrived at through his psychoanalytic approach. For Nandy in a similar way to working through carried out in a psychoanalytic therapy, also works through the cultural and psychic resistances that otherwise block an appreciation of the damage and distortions that the ideology of the Indian secular state has entailed. As he explains, “it is like the psychoanalyst’s interpretation of the patient. Even when the interpretation is wrong it is therapeutic because it ensures self-reflection. Diversity expands the range of human cognition and re-establishes an open dialogue between knowledge and feelings, even when it includes the bizarre and eccentric.”

Nandy’s position can be understood as an invitation to explore the dialogic features of democracy, to live with difference, ambivalence and pluralism and in doing so to work with these dynamics. In reflecting on the criticisms already made of him by Nayar, Nandy in a moment of reclaiming self and subjectivity suggests, “readers may like to look up more serious scholars on the subject.” These issues however, extend beyond the territorial anxieties of the Indian intelligentsia and Nandy’s real and perceived position within it. This fear of the post-secular in Nandy’s account is intimately tied to the complexities of the democratic paradox. In this account it is both the pluralism of the people along with their own internal resources that can transform the positioning of the boundaries constituting politics. In advocating this view in his two replies to Achin Vanaik and Kuldip Nayar Nandy locates his analysis at the threshold of politics, and within the possibility of a new political imaginary.

6.4 The Possibility of a New Political Imaginary

It is important to emphasise that Nandy’s willingness to confront aspects of Indian identity and political culture deemed abject, is not an effort to eradicate abjection. Rather Nandy’s efforts are in recognising the positioning of boundaries constituting

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individual and collective subjectivities, and in preserving the possibility of challenging and regenerating subjectivity. This extends to the possibility of transforming our relationship to our selves and to others. Noelle McAfee raises a pertinent question in relation to Kirsteva’s work, and the point is equally relevant for understanding Nandy’s critical intervention in questioning secularism. McAfee questions whether it is even possible or even desirable to rid ourselves of abjection? For “without abjection, would personal and political identity (self-same and different from others) [even] be possible?”\textsuperscript{106} I have argued that Nandy’s willingness to confront that which is abjected from a dominant Indian secular political imaginary, and to traverse the threats posed by the democratic paradox and the post-secular, is underpinned by his sensitivity to the ways that processes of internalisation and externalisation. Nandy’s capacity to raise these issues and his analysis of the ways in political identities are formed. Although Nandy does not articulate his efforts in these terms I have argued that these psychoanalytic concepts enable us to conceptualise Nandy’s own psychoanalytic focus further. In confronting the abject there is a possibility for an alternative in this moment though and it is this moment of reconstituting meaning and subjectivity that Nandy willingly confronts in his critique. In doing so Nandy’s approach can be further understood with what Julia Kristeva notes is “the double time of abjection.”\textsuperscript{107} As Kristeva clarifies while abjection is “a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity” it is simultaneously also “the moment when revelation bursts forth.”\textsuperscript{108} In other words while it is overwhelmingly threatening and destabilising to confront that which is abject and traverse the security of the secular fantasy, this moment is as Nandy’s critique of secularism demonstrates, also a moment of possible transformation. It is a possibility to re-position and transform the positioning of established boundaries of meaning: secularism and religion, the public and private and self and the other. In Nandy’s work this leads to a regenerated understanding of politics in which the ambivalence, contradiction and pluralism within human subjectivity and Indian traditions is afforded political recognition.

\textsuperscript{107}Noelle McAfee, \textit{Ibid.}, 121.
\textsuperscript{108}Julia Kristeva quoted in Noelle McAfee, \textit{Ibid.}, 121.
Politics for Nandy is intimately and necessarily so, tied to “the challenge of the breaking down and the reconstitutions of the imaginary field that defines a society.”\textsuperscript{109} This leads in his work to a radically different understanding of politics. In Mouffe’s work what is identified as the fear of the antagonistic feature of democracy, should be allowed expression she argues in an agonistic form, in order to preserve the vital tensions between consensus and dissent.\textsuperscript{110} Nandy too is not interested in eradicating the tensions within Indian democracy and Indian politics. For it is within these dynamic tensions that the very conditions of the political culture he is interested in fostering are to be found. This is not an idealised vision of a pre-modern India returning to view, as perhaps some of his critics might claim, but a confrontation with the ways this pre-modern India continues to exist in tension with the modern. For Nandy this is where the threatening democratic paradox and the pluralism within Indian democracy is not contained or reconciled but lived with. It is also where traversing the fear of the post-secular leads to a “multiverse dialogue” between disavowed parts of one’s self, including one’s cultural self. This also brings us back to the question of the fear of democracy and the need for democratic pluralism and the “multiverse dialogue” within democracy to be lived with.\textsuperscript{111} These processes are nonetheless confronting and not without considerable internal struggle and resistance. For Nandy, the ability to extend a hand to the other is only ever possible when the disavowed, repressed and abjected parts of one’s own subjectivity, one’s own radical alterity is confronted. What is possible externally within a political imaginary is intimately tied to our internal capacities, within the boundaries of psychic life. In Nandy’s critique this necessarily includes recognition of the internal resources within human subjectivity but also the internal resources available within Indian traditions and culture.

Nandy, armed with his psychoanalytic approach to these issues is not just the voice of the provocative diagnostician in these debates on secularism. He is not only the voice declaring the pathologies of the patient incurable, for he cannot entirely be the

\textsuperscript{109} This is a phrase coined by Celia Sjoholm in relation to Kristeva’s efforts to regenerate a politics of meaning. The expression is equally applicable in connecting Nandy’s own critical efforts. Celia Sjoholm, \textit{Kristeva and the Political}, (London: Routledge, 2005): 81.

\textsuperscript{110} Mouffe in making this argument challenges Carl Schmitt’s friend/enemy distinction of the political. She establishes that “what democracy requires is drawing the we/they distinction in a way which is compatible with the recognition of the pluralism which is constitutive of modern democracy.” See Chapter Two “Politics and the Political” in Chantal Mouffe, \textit{On the Political}, (2005): 14.

detached outsider. Rather what passes as a detached outsider’s gaze with respect to his identity, is attributable to an internal dynamic operating within his work and identity as critic. The confrontation and working through already noted as features of Nandy’s work and fundamental to his approach needs to be explored alongside his willing capacity to enter into these psychoanalytic processes. In a similar point made by Jacqueline Rose regarding Freud, I propose that we see Nandy “more squarely inside the dilemma of identity which he describes.”\textsuperscript{112} In articulating the complexities of subjectivity and politics through an emphasis on internal and external processes, I contend that the modality of Nandy’s critique casts these dynamics of intellectual intervention as necessarily a dialectical process between inner and outer incentives. This willingness to confront the abject in Indian political culture and to traverse a dominant Indian secular political ideal demonstrates a distinctive sensitivity for entering into psychoanalytic processes. In the following chapter I explore the role of psychoanalysis in his work and the way it informs his identity as critic. It is made possible from having confronted these issues as an internal question, within the self. This internal questioning therefore precipitates a sensitivity, reflexivity and capacity to address these issues of subjectivity in his work. This does not detract from the fact that these processes of confrontation remain deeply threatening and disruptive, particularly for the self. For the fixtures of identity, including in this case one’s intellectual identity is to follow Rose’s comments still “something, which is hard to escape.”\textsuperscript{113} Once committed to this internal confrontation and analysis, including working through these complexities and struggles that accompany such a task, Nandy’s work and his identity as critic, moves us into the vernacular of the psychotherapeutic. In the chapter that follows I draw on psychoanalytic theory and in particular, Julia Kristeva’s account of revolt to further characterise the confrontation and working through that are central to Nandy’s approach. In doing so I also explore how the therapeutic features in his work,\textsuperscript{112}\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112}This point is made in a reply provided by Jacqueline Rose to Edward Said’s essay “Freud and the Non-European.” Here she is responding to Said’s point regarding the ambivalence of Freud’s identity which Said argues underpins his work, particularly his text Moses and Monotheism. Rose states that in Said’s reading, it is “through his complex, ambivalent relationship to his own Jewish identity, Freud precisely as outsider, was able to tear away the façade of European perfectibility long before the horrors of the Second World War and the violence of anti-colonial struggle would bring crashing to the ground.” See Edward W. Said, Freud and the Non-European, (London: Verso, 2003): 70.\textsuperscript{113} Rose continues in her reply to Said. She states: “more simply I am suggesting that the fixity of identity – for Freud, for any of us – is something from which it is hard to escape – harder than Said, for wholly admirable motives wants it to be.” See Edward W. Said, Ibid., 74.
but moreover, is a feature of the psychoanalytic mode that Nandy enter into to generate social and political criticism.
Chapter 7: Revolt and the Search for Critical Intervention

I have argued that Nandy’s critique of secularism demonstrates an intellectual autonomy in breaking away from an existing logic of argumentation within the debates on secularism. Nandy displaces and traverses the political ideal that “secularism is India’s destiny,” and in doing so rejects conformity to a dominant Indian secular political ideal. This autonomy of thought is for example, evident in his distinctive willingness to confront and question aspects of Indianness deemed threatening and disruptive to Indian secular political culture and to political identities. However, for Nandy that which is deemed threatening within Indian secular political culture, also needs to be understood alongside the deeper and more complex fears of people’s choices operating in Indian democracy, and the threat that the post-secular poses to politics. In identifying these fears, and as I have argued, in confronting and working through these defences, Nandy is able to distinguish himself as a critical voice that traverses the narcissistic fantasy of the secular ideal. Thus far I have explored Nandy’s intellectual autonomy, and his capacity to confront, work through, and traverse the effects of the distortions of this dominant secular ideal, by drawing on the analytic concepts of the abject and abjection. These concepts are central to the formation of human subjectivity within Kristeva’s work, and have been applied to theorise Nandy’s aptitude for confronting aspects of self and of culture, which has been abjected or cast from view in pursuit of the secular ideal.

Kristeva’s concepts of the abject and abjection have been applied, consistent with her definition to denote that “the time of abjection is double.” Nandy confronts that which is deemed abject as a feature of his approach and identity as critic, and demonstrates this double time of abjection. For while on the one hand abjection “represents the strangeness of the speaking being, the original repulsion, disgust,” on

1 This is the dominant idea operating within Indian political culture and reinforced by political parties, such as the Congress Party. An example of this commitment is evidenced in Sonia Gandhi’s public defence of secularism as India’s destiny. See Sonia Gandhi, “Secularism Is India’s Destiny,” Outlook, (10 December) (2002).

the other it marks “the process of his autonomy and access to signs.” This “double time” is evident in the way that Nandy’s own confronting strangeness, that is his anti-secularism, is responded to and represented in the debates on secularism. However, in this moment of confrontation that Nandy enters into, in confronting as I have suggested that which is deemed abject in politics, there is also the potential for new meaning. For instance, this is demonstrated in his capacity to retrieve back into view aspects of Indianness deemed threatening and disruptive to an Indian secular culture. These ambiguities are welcomed in Nandy’s analysis as fundamental to understanding the complexities of subjectivity, Indian accounts of selfhood, democratic processes and the post-secular. These ambiguities are contained by dominant meanings and established boundaries of underpinning politics, but in Nandy’s account, represent moments of possible regeneration. This includes regenerating established, norms, meanings and identities, as he confronts the positioning of the boundaries of secular and non-secular, public and private and self and other. Therefore, it is through what I have detailed as Nandy’s willing confrontation with the abject, that the imaginary and symbolic regeneration and re-articulation of politics is made possible.

In Ewa Ziarek’s analysis of this connection between the concept of abjection and autonomy of thought, she reinforces Kristeva’s emphasis on the possibility for transformation within these moments. Ziarek reminds us that, “such an encounter with the abject – with what is intolerable and irreconcilable with not only imaginary but also symbolic identifications of the subject enables the negativisation of the narcissistic ego and the interruption of narcissistic economies in love and social relations.” In applying Ziarek’s descriptions – the negativisation of the narcissistic ego and the interruption of narcissistic economies - the following can be noted to further understand the confrontation with the abject that Nandy enters into. Firstly, Nandy begins by radically questioning the centrality of a narcissistic secular ego-ideal dominant within Indian

3 Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 158. This doubled-edged feature of Kristeva’s concept has informed the claims made in this dissertation about Nandy’s identity and his work. Part B, *Symptomatic Responses: Reading the Politics of Blame*, of this dissertation explored this strangeness and threat which Nandy as the phobic object and abject figure represents. The autonomy of thought that Nandy demonstrates in this moment of confronting the abject is also explored at length in Part C, *Critical Interventions: Towards the Psychotherapeutic*.

4 Ewa Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism and the Politics of Radical Democracy*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2001): 132. For Ziarek this negativisation of narcissism is made possible because of the internal alterity and antagonism that already exists within Kristeva’s account of human subjectivity. This enables Kristeva within her work to search for different modalities of ethics, which also constitutes Ziarek’s primary theme developed in this text.
political culture and in political identities. His discussion of the ways this narcissistic ego makes over ethnic identities into political identities through processes of subjection demonstrates this. Nandy confronts the ways in which these processes ultimately lead to a series of distortions within the ideology, namely an inability to safeguard tolerance and political amity. However, the dominant narcissistic ego underpinning processes of identification is also evident in the way that secularism is fiercely defended. Nandy consistent with his efforts to disrupt the dominance of this narcissistic ego, exposes this continuing defence of secularism as, at best naïve, and at worst, dangerous. Nandy’s analysis of the ways in which the political subject is formed in accordance with this ego ideal enables him to account for and explore latent features of self and of political culture, which, as he claims, are essential to understanding Indian political culture. In exploring both the deviations and distortions from the ideal, Nandy radically confronts the dominant position of the secular political identity. Simply stated, there are other accounts of subjectivity, like that of the non-modern peripheral armed with their alternative accounts of secularism that resist the dominance of this secular ideal. To adopt Ziarek’s own expression this possibility that Nandy brings back into view as a feature of Indian political culture, albeit latent, constitutes “an ethics of dissensus.”

The second feature of Nandy’s intellectual autonomy is his capacity to traverse the deeply imbedded structure of fantasy underpinning the defence of secularism. This ability extends to Nandy’s capacity to traverse the fantasy, which operates in parallel ways to fiercely protect the status of secularism in the debates on Indian secularism. I have already detailed the ways in which this traversal of the fantasy also enables Nandy to recognise alternative possibilities, already present within concepts of Indianness, Indian democracy and within Indian culture and traditions. However, Ziarek states that, “the traversal of fantasy confronts the subject with abjection as its most intimate exteriority.” If this is the case then the way Nandy confronts this “intimate exteriority,” and further informs his identity, as critic needs to be explored as a feature of his intellectual autonomy. Nandy’s own awareness of this intimate exteriority, is noted by what Makarand Paranjape has identified is the “self-representation and self-

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5 See Ewa Ziarek, Ibid., 132.
6 Refer to Chapter 6, Confronting the Abject: At the Threshold of Politics.
engineering” that goes on in his work.8 This reflexivity and self-reflexivity has also been noted in the two replies Nandy provides to critics Achin Vanaik and Kuldip Nayar. In his two written replies to these critics Nandy explains this intimate exteriority in terms of the class betrayal that he enters into. Nandy is fully aware that his confrontation with secularism necessitates a betrayal or a disloyalty, in rejecting the secular ideal that is supported by his contemporaries and his middle class counterparts within the Indian intelligentsia. However, Nandy also acknowledges that this betrayal involves a self-betrayal. As he explains, “I belong to the middle class. I am a product of the middle class and I feel most comfortable with the secular world view; I am not a believer.”10 Such comments point to the importance of the internal betrayal that Nandy enters into, as a betrayal against dominant parts of self, in order to generate social and political criticism.

In having transgressed the narcissistic secular ego ideal and the fantasy structure of defence, Nandy unapologetically wears his self-professed anti-secular badge, and class betrayal, firmly on his sleeve. What role does this betray play though in understanding the dissent that he enters into as critic of the state and the critiques that he produces? In this chapter this betrayal is conceptualised as part of Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach to producing social and political criticism. Nandy reveals something of this approach when he explains that, “I don’t think any social criticism is worth it unless it challenges one’s own interests in some fundamental sense.”11 What Ziarek cautions then, is a confrontation with one’s most intimate exteriority, is crucial to understanding Nandy’s capacity to confront the abject, and the intellectual autonomy that follows from this. There are then internal processes within the identity of the critic that need to be accounted for including the way Nandy confronts the boundaries of his

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10 Christine Deftereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session IV” (Unpublished Interviews. New Delhi, India 2005): 26. Elsewhere Nandy acknowledges this feature by stating the following: “You know there is an inbuilt criticism in many of my remarks. A psychiatrist once said to me, ‘What I miss in your writing is self-criticism.’ Well that is where it comes out. What’s the point of saying Indian’s suffer from a range of pathologies if one exempts oneself from criticism by cleverly defining oneself as an enlightened liberal declassed exception?” Phillip Darby, ed. Postcolonising the International: Working to Change the Way We Are, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 2006).
own identity, turns against dominant parts of self, and radical confronts his own certitudes, introjections and projections. In short, Nandy displays a commitment to psychoanalytic processes that need to be characterised. This is central to further understanding Nandy’s intellectual autonomy, as his own explanation of this as betrayal does not fully account for how he is able to enter into these processes. The question remains as to what actuates and precipitate’s Nandy’s own willingness to enter into these states of intimate confrontation and analysis? Alternatively what enables Nandy to repeatedly enter into a mode of critical intervention predicated on “defying the given models of defiance?”

7.1 Intellectual Autonomy, Psychoanalysis and Nandy’s Analytic Attitude

I have suggested that there is a greater complexity to understanding Nandy’s willingness for confrontation demonstrated in his work. This is explored and developed in this chapter by characterising Nandy’s mode of critical intervention. Some of these features of this mode are already discernable through the discussion of his critique of secularism, which I have argued is characterised by its psychoanalytic focus. Nandy’s own training as a political psychologist, including his clinical training with a psychoanalytic orientation, predisposes him to these issues, questions and concerns. His idiosyncratic use of psychoanalytic concepts and language is evident in his emphasis on internal and external tensions within the self and society, the psychic life of power, and concern for the positioning of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In critiquing secularism in terms of its cultural and psychological viability, and in questioning the secularisation of the Indian self, Nandy demonstrates this psychoanalytic dimension operating in his work. This sensitivity for analysis is similarly evident in his capacity to reflect on his betrayal.

Consistent with the discussion of Nandy’s identity thus far, this presence of the psychoanalytic in his work is not marked or rather dominated by a specific interpretation; in being for instance, classically Freudian. What he cultivates in his work can be explained with what Philip Reiff calls following Freud, is an “analytic

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attitude.” However, as Nandy states it is “no longer the psychoanalysis I was taught and exposed to.” He continues that, “it has become somewhat very personalized and generalized.” The analytic attitude that is present is referenced in more subtle terms and consequently, is not always recognised as an application of psychoanalytic theory. Nandy’s reflects on his commitment for an analytic attitude in the following passage. He notes,

So in the later work you will find that I have learned how to use this language in such a way that when I use psychoanalytic terms, the psychoanalytic person conversing with this is comfortable, but the ordinary reader also gets the hang of what I am trying to say. So turning against the self or rationalizations, identifications, projections these are very important. These are used technically. But also I have learned over the years how to use them in such a context that those who don’t, who have not read a word of psychoanalysis, will still get an idea of what it is about.

There is the issue then of how Nandy uses and applies psychoanalysis in his work to generate critique, with what has been noted is his de-professionalised gaze. We might add that this approach, his de-professionalisation of self, is celebrated in Nandy’s account for its lack of formality, and because of its idiosyncratic and personalised application. This autonomy of thought demonstrated in his application of these concepts and methods in this way remains though a source of fascination and horror for critics. Vinay Lal argues that this autonomy in Nandy’s approach is consistent with the

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15 Christine Deftereos, Ibid., 7.

16 Christine Deftereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session I,” (2005): 8. It should be noted that within the scope of this dissertation I do not explore in any detail how Nandy, for example, deviates from Freud in his application of Freudian meta-psychological concepts, other than to note the idiosyncratic and dissenting features of this analytic mode within his work, and in turning to characterise this mode.


18 Refer to Part B, Symptomatic Responses: Reading the Politics of Blame.
democratisation of knowledge operating in his work and advanced through his role as scholar and public intellectual.\textsuperscript{19} This along with Nandy’s defence of democracy and democratic processes renders him in Lal’s appraisal as “the ultimate dissenter” and as a “radical democrat.”\textsuperscript{20} Lal’s appraisal is consistent with Nandy’s search for a mode of dissent that radically challenges the Enlightenment vision, and which leads, as he claims to “a different kind of life.”\textsuperscript{21} These efforts underpin the mode of dissent or mode of critical intervention he is interested in developing. For as Nandy cautions even the dissenting voice of Freud along with his dissenting analytic attitude can become contained “within the citadels of modernity.”\textsuperscript{22}

Nandy’s warnings against processes of conformity, domestication, standardisation and homogenisation are developed in more sustained ways in his 2004 essay titled “Freud, Modernity and Postcolonial Violence.”\textsuperscript{23} In this essay he builds a case for a dissenting analytic attitude that challenges and confronts existing traditions of dissent within Modernity. To this extend the essay repeats a continuing thematic concern with the positioning of boundaries and what constitutes tolerable and intolerable or alternatively expressed audible and inaudible dissent. Nandy affirms his commitment to psychoanalysis, albeit an idiosyncratic and personalised commitment, and to a psychoanalytic perspective by stating that, “the body of work that challenges the Enlightenment vision, when not directly dependent on psychoanalytic insights, has borrowed heavily from clinical work and therapeutic visions.”\textsuperscript{24} While he offers a number of reasons for this, it is namely that Freud, a product of multiple cultural traditions, including what Edward Said describes as his “outsider status,” remains one

\textsuperscript{21} Nandy argues that, “the fact remains that this dissenter [the dissenting children of modernity] uses the language of the Enlightenment. So in some sense this is not at all adequate for those who speak entirely differently, outside of this. And who has found the Enlightenment to a great extent self complicit. The Enlightenment consciousness is complicit with the violence, uprooting, and the de-culturation they have confronted in their lives or in their pasts of their communities. They need a different kind of life.” See Christine Deftereos, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session II,” (Unpublished Interviews. New Delhi, India 2005): 6.
\textsuperscript{23} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{24} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
of the rebellious children of Modernity.\textsuperscript{25} Freud did not necessarily reject the Enlightenment vision, but his rebelliousness is evident in his primary discovery of the unconscious that radically rallied against the accepted norms and ideals of the time.\textsuperscript{26} This includes Freud’s radical critique of the idealisation of the rational Cartesian subject in western discourse. Yet for Nandy this dissenting Freud is however, today a “stranger to many.”\textsuperscript{27} These dissenting features have been foreclosed by a number of contemporary post-Freudian interpretations of psychoanalysis and of Freud’s legacy. These contemporary readings of a Freudian analytic attitude have contributed to co-opting this tradition of dissent into conformity. This conformity takes effect through the ways these “stalwarts who contributed to the Enlightenment vision, tended to nurture one particular kind of critical attitude.”\textsuperscript{28} This attitude is further validated by ““the global triumph of rationality, sanity and progress (encased in an expanding global culture of common sense and conventionality)” which resides within contemporary Indian middle-class culture.\textsuperscript{29} This common sense and conformity now applies to an analytic attitude that is accepted as a mode of demystification or unmasking. It is assumed that manifest reality after a point needs to be demystified. The processes of unmasking assume that a truth claim (or a claim closer to the truth) can then be made. This process of demystification as a mastery of one’s reality, is however problematic. For Nandy this critical tradition leads to the establishment of a second order reality. This provides the conditions for a new set of certitudes, through which “a new society, a new social vision, and even a new human personality could be built based on this new hermeneutics.”\textsuperscript{30}


\textsuperscript{26} For an analysis of representations of Freud and psychoanalysis, including the controversial reception of his work refer to George Makari, 	extit{Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis}, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 2008).

\textsuperscript{27} Nandy continues, that, “the problem is compounded by the various schools of post-Freudian psychology, which are mostly progenies of the theoretical frames that crystalised as forms of dissent within the Enlightenment.” Ashis Nandy, “Freud, Modernity and Postcolonial Violence,” (2004): 2.

\textsuperscript{28} Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 3.

\textsuperscript{29} Ashis Nandy, 	extit{Ibid.}, 3.

What Nandy celebrates as the critical impetus within the Freudian analytic attitude now becomes subject to processes of standardisation, homogenisation and containment. The consequences of striving to domesticate an otherness, that psychoanalysis already recognises as unable to be domesticated, carries an ethical and political dimension in Nandy’s reading. He notes that, “one-way style of demystification has not merely become a new source of certitude, but also a new means of legitimising the forced obsolescence for those marginalized by the world system.”31 The only mastery that is ethically acceptable in Nandy’s account of the analytic attitude is within these psychoanalytic processes of self-knowledge and awareness.32 It is the Freudian psychoanalytic experience of remembering, repeating, working through, which creates the conditions for a psychoanalytic rebirth of self as a dynamic and continuous process. Alternatively expressed in the work of the French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva it is the return to the timelessness of psychic life that enables this analytic rebirth.33

In critiquing and challenging processes of closure Nandy’s own intellectual commitment to an analytic mode that I argue operates within his work, cannot be defined in these terms. What distinguishes his analytic mode as critical intervention is this confrontation and willingness to work through stagnation, standardisation and homogenisation. This analytic mode of engagement arguably already operates in the following statement when he tells us that,

…In that sense I think we have to extend Philip Reiff’s analytic attitude where it presumes that the Freudian analytical attitude, once it has demystified, that it has reached closer to the truth…I don’t think you have reached closer to the truth, because after a point you get used to that form of demystification and that becomes justification for new kinds of violence and expropriation.34

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32 A similar point is made in the work of Alexander and Margarete Mitschelich who argue that the only mastering that is possible is in the ways in which psychoanalysis as a psychotherapeutic practice leads one into an unmastered past as a sequence of steps in self knowledge. See “The Inability to Mourn” in Robert J. Lifton, *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).
33 This depiction of an analytic rebirth is explained within this chapter in greater detail in the following section on “Julia Kristeva and the Intimacy of Revolt.”
There is a distinctive dissenting feature to this analytic attitude that does not end with accepted theories of demystification, but which carries forward a continuing internal critical dynamic in challenging such truth claims. To ensure the critical edge and continuation of this dynamic Nandy advances that, “any significant psychological or political theory, to be so recognized, must have either an element of self-destructiveness or a subsystem of self-criticism built in.” It is this ‘internal dynamic’ that is essential to the analytic attitude that Nandy theorises in this essay and which I develop as equally important to the psychoanalytic mode operating in his work. While the essay does not elaborate further on this inner dynamic, it is the operation of the psychoanalytic mode in his work that provides Nandy with the capacity to raise these very issues. This analytic mode requires an inbuilt self-criticism, which I have already suggested includes a confrontation with the boundaries of selfhood. So while Nandy recognises the critical power of the Freudian psychoanalytic experience, it is the ways in which this critical psychoanalytic impulse or dynamic can be domesticated, that he objects. This is more than an intellectual point of difference or objection, but a confrontation and displacement, what can be called a revolt against these processes of standardisation and homogenisation. There is a revolt against these efforts to contain or domesticate this analytical attitude or as it operates in Nandy’s work and subjectivity, a psychoanalytic mode.

Kristeva’s account of revolt, as a “constant calling into question the psyche as well as the world” is useful here to describe the psychoanalytic mode underpinning Nandy’s work. For as I argue Nandy’s methods of critique are not predicated on a logic of analytic mastery, but on a psychoanalytic mode as revolt. For Nandy this process of psychoanalytic questioning “does not stop with the formal standardized modes of demystification or unmasking.” In Kristeva’s account of revolt these processes are dynamic and continuous. She warns that revolt is only possible as long as it “remains a live force and resists accommodation.” The concept is also useful because Kristeva correctly emphasises not the permanence of revolt but the regenerative possibilities of

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revolt.\textsuperscript{39} To this extent the concept of revolt and what Kristeva calls the need for a ‘revolt culture’ is a call “to redirect the aggressivity of the drive from the abjection of the self to the transformation of the social relations.”\textsuperscript{40} In Kristeva’s account of revolt this regeneration expresses, “the process, dynamic, and movement of meaning, not reduced to language but encompassing it.”\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, revolt is not only a rupturing or de-centring but as Chanter and Ziarek explains, a renewal and regeneration of, “...psychic life and social bonds through symbolic re-articulation, which leads to the institution of new forms of social relations, collective identification, and representations.”\textsuperscript{42}

It is worth establishing some qualifications to the application of Kristeva’s concept to characterising the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work. The reason for drawing on Kristeva’s concept of revolt is not to enter into the many complex debates surrounding her work.\textsuperscript{43} Nor is it my intention to assess the concept of revolt within her earlier work, particularly Revolution in Poetic Language which commentators like Lechte and Zournazi propose.\textsuperscript{44} In Chanter and Ziarek’s text comprised of a series of essays dedicated to exploring the political logic of revolt, they suggest the concept needs to be read alongside her work produced in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{45} Instead, I apply certain aspects of Kristeva’s account of revolt to characterise Nandy’s mode of critical intervention. This mode I contend actuates critical analytic perspectives that rupture and regenerate meaning and signification, including the meaning and signification of subjectivity. In my assessment Nandy in and through this mode becomes the critical analytic intellectual and in the process regenerates his own

\textsuperscript{39} Kristeva develops this more fully in the second of her two-part volume on revolt, where she clearly emphasises that more than just a re-enactment of the processes of revolt is needed because as she argues, “it is not enough to revive the permanence of revolt.” Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, (2002): 6.
\textsuperscript{41} Julia Kristeva, The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt, (2000): 37.
\textsuperscript{42} Tina Chanter, and Ewa Ziarek, eds., Revolt, Affect, Collectivity, (2005): 3.
\textsuperscript{45} For instance Chanter and Ziarek argue that Kristeva’s later work on revolt is a departure from an early dialectical conception of revolt based on the law/transgression model and founded in Freud’s Oedipal account of patricide as the obverse of the paternal law. See Tina Chanter, and Ewa Ziarek, eds., Revolt, Affect, Collectivity, (2005): 4.
subjectivity. It is my thesis that the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt defines Nandy’s contributions to social and political criticism. In the first instance though, the features of Kristeva’s account of revolt must be detailed, before moving on to applying this to characterise the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work.

7.2 Julia Kristeva and the Intimacy of Revolt

If Nandy pleads for an analytic attitude to counter the “rhetoric of wider choice,” then Kristeva’s account of revolt demonstrates how this can be achieved. Consistent with Kristeva’s intellectual focus her account of revolt is developed within a psychoanalytic framework. More specifically this account is drawn from transferential features of the Freudian analytic experience. Kristeva shares Nandy’s concern for the need to reclaim what he terms is the dissenting features of the Freudian analytic attitude. This account is developed in Kristeva’s two texts *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 1* (2000) and her later work *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2* (2002). The concept of revolt that she explores is located within the powers and limits of psychoanalysis.

In Volume 1 Kristeva details two features of the Freudian experience of analytic revolt. It is both an Oedipal revolt and as a return to the archaic, to the “timeless temporality” of psychic life. In understanding revolt in this way Kristeva displaces and reclaims the concept from its exclusive political foundations and interpretations. In reclaiming revolt this way she explores what she terms is the “richness of its polyvalence.” This richness is demonstrated through the return to the archaic described as “a return to sensations in words under the pressure of Unconscious drives.” Psychoanalysis in the clinical setting developed by Freud is where revolt is to be found. For Kristeva one of Freud’s key contributions is this notion of “analytic space as a time of revolt,” in which the transferential experience between analyst and analysand is privileged. This experience subject to the law of free association involves

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49 Kristeva continues that this is “a return provoking the splitting of the subject between an observant consciousness, on the one hand, and a constellation of words/sensations with the value of reified images, relics of the incorporated object on the other.” Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, (2002): 175.
retrieving memory and entering into the timelessness of unconscious life through processes of anamnesis with the analyst. This dynamic relationship between analyst and analysand is the site of revolt as meanings; signification and representations are regenerated through a psychic re-birth. Revolt as Kristeva describes it, is as Oliver and Edmin note, “the experience of inclusion through representation, through making language and meaning one’s own in order to speak to others.”

In the first text *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (2000) Kristeva expands on the ways in which processes of revolt can be experienced. Revolt can be experienced in three ways: firstly, as the transgression of a prohibition; secondly, as repetition, a working-through, or working-out; and thirdly, in as displacement or combinative, games. Kristeva illustrates how these experiences take form and are represented in her analysis of three rebellious literary figures *in revolt*: Aragon, Sartre and Barthes. Through this reading Kristeva builds a case for the necessity of revolt, including what she calls a culture of revolt. The necessity of revolt is explained in terms of the function it performs for our individual and collective psychic wellbeing. Revolt is however, imbued with a specific intensity, for it literally concerns the life and death of the subject. Revolt, including a culture of revolt, keeps us psychically alive by safeguarding our inner capacities for thought. Revolt safeguards psychic life from the dangerous and destructive processes of stagnation and homogenisation that are in Kristeva’s terms quite literally the death of the subject. As she explains “I see no other role for literary criticism and theory than to illuminate the experiences of formal and philosophical revolt that might keep our inner lives alive.”

Revolt thus at the individual level preserves our psychic wellbeing, and a perpetual questioning operating within psychic life, whilst a culture of revolt equally safeguards the collective well being of the psychic life of a society, in similar ways by fostering this dynamic. For Kristeva what can be discerned from the psychoanalytic setting of listening to human experience is that “happiness exists only at the price of revolt.”

52 This is not just a question of psychic life for Kristeva. She prefaced this with the point that “if such a culture did not exist, life would become a life of death, that is, a life of physical and moral violence, barbarity.” Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, (2000): 7.
transgressed or worked through a prohibition (such as a law, authority, ideal, and superego.) To enter into these processes is to enter into the processes of revolt.

In *Intimate Revolt* (2002) Kristeva extends on this necessity of revolt in psychic life and its broader social implications. Kristeva explores the political logic of revolt, by contrasting the intimacy of revolt with politics and the social. In safeguarding psychic life, which she calls our most intimate interior space, revolt denotes internal and external processes. However, for Kristeva “the intimate” she explains, “is where we end up when we question apparent meanings and values.”54 The intimate interiority of psychic life is where revolt takes place. Celia Sjoholm argues that the intimate is the privileged site of revolt for Kristeva. Sjoholm reads this alongside Kristeva’s efforts to reclaim the concept of revolt from a dominant political framework.55 In Kristeva’s account the intimate emerges as a response to the political domain. She states, “the intimate revolt is in fact the only possible revolt, intimacy being that which is the most profound and the most singular in us; the political having become too technocratic, too totalitarian and conflated with the social: the intimate domain evolves as a response.”56 The intimate evolves as a response to what Kristeva claims are doctrines that have fixed and closed off meaning and representation in the political realm. She also rejects accounts that seek to fix and close off the meaning and representation of the intimate. Such accounts must be rejected because they foreclose the dynamics inherent in the timelessness of psychic life. Kristeva elaborates on this dynamism when she tells us that, “the liveliest aspect of the intimate – resides precisely in the heterogeneity of the two sensorial/symbolic, affect/thought registers.”57 Intimate revolt, as Kristeva advances are processes that rely on the dynamic interplay of these two registers. I focus on four aspects of Kristeva’s account of intimate revolt to illustrate the importance of this dynamism within the concept. These are firstly, anamnesis as psychic restructuring; secondly, the conflicts of resistance: *not wanting to know*; thirdly the necessity for a culture of revolt and finally, the radical evil of standardisation, and homogenisation. Furthermore, these aspects of Kristeva’s account of revolt characterise the mode of critical engagement and dissent operating in Nandy’s work and identity.

56 Kristeva quoted in Sjoholm. See “Revolutions of our Time: Revolt as Return” in Celia Sjoholm, Ibid., 114.
57 For if psychoanalysis is an experience of the intimate we therefore appeal to psychical life as both discourse and affect, indissolubly. See Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt,* (2000): 49.
7.2.1 *Anamnesis as Psychic Restructuring*

Revolt safeguards the intimate, as a field of possible imaginings and symbolic re-articulations from stagnation and conformity. For Kristeva these features of stagnation, conformity, domestication and homogenisation represent a deeply threatening malaise within contemporary social and political life. This conformity and stagnation of thought within society is captured in Guy Debord’s depiction of the “society of the spectacle.” Following Debord Kristeva warns that when a society has lost its capacity to regenerate its own symbols and signs, to interpret and imagine alternatives, then psychic wellbeing is compromised. The society of the spectacle that Debord describes is for Kristeva symptomatic of “this breakdown of the Imaginary…which can be attributed to the surfeit of non-verbal, non-verbalised images which characterise today’s spectator society.” To safeguarding against this breakdown of the Imaginary and to preserve the life of the subject Kristeva turns to anamnesis. She argues that revolt is “an invitation to anamnesis in the goal of a rebirth that is psychic restructuring.”

To enter into these processes of revolt is to accept the invitation for a psychic re-birth. Kristeva emphasises that, “the possibility of questioning one’s own being, searching for oneself (se quaerere: “quaesto mihi factus sum”), is offered by this aptitude for return, which is simultaneously recollection, interrogation, and thought.” The process of retrospection and turning inwards into self in order to confront, rupture, and regenerate psychic life is essential to revolt. Anamnesis, retrospective return, this turning into self, refers to our capacity for questioning and interrogation, or simply stated – thought itself. Anamnesis is a dynamic process of turning back and working through or working out, or displacement through which thought can be regenerated. These processes also regenerate and reconstitute the boundaries of self. In inviting us to confront and work through existing structures, assumptions, beliefs in psychic life, psychic re-birth

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58 Kristeva’s use of Guy Debord’s expression society of the spectacle denotes the effects of standardisation and conformity within a society which has lost its capacity to interpret object sand signs, loosing access to the capacity for fantasy. As Kristeva states, “when all information is virtually image, the spread of information and its crystallization in the visible prescribe belief in a total consciousness.” See Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, (2002): 140.


therefore, also denotes a re-birth of subjectivity. These processes of revolt are dynamic process inviting us into the possibilities of what Kristeva describes is infinite re-
creation.

7.2.2 The Conflicts of Resistance: Not Wanting to Know

The psychoanalytic experience of revolt is for Kristeva accompanied by internal conflicts and resistances. These resistances are a defence mechanism operating within psychic life against the threat of change and the threat of psychic re-birth. These defence mechanisms reveal themselves as denial, disavowal and foreclosure, as a not wanting to know. Kristeva explains that revolt is marked by an internal conflict which “collides with the human being’s desire not to know,” especially from knowing truths (about himself/herself or others) that may place him/her in revolt. This defence mechanism perpetuates denial and a politics of silencing ensuring that the boundaries of self remain unchanged and repeated without question or critical reflection. This state of stagnation extends beyond the psychic life of the individual and is also evident in cultural, social and political configurations. Kristeva notes that these defence mechanisms operating in a broader social context can also denote resistance to psychoanalysis. She alerts us to the fact that not all societies celebrate the regenerative possibilities of what she terms is a cultural of revolt. For Kristeva, revolt brings us face-to-face with this invitation to work through these individual and collective resistances, and in doing so to accept the possibilities of regeneration and a psychic re-birth. Kristeva continues,

62 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 11.
63 This defense mechanism has been demonstrated in Part B, Symptomatic Responses: Reading the Politics of Blame, as a feature of the debates on secularism. This denial has also been explored in the precious chapter through Nandy’s account of the ways in which this operates within the debates. In responding to his critics Nandy recognises the denial at play in terms of certain critic’s inability to engage with his work. He explains this defense using Rollo May’s concept of “pseudo-innocence” or “inauthentic innocence.” In this chapter I argue that Nandy is able to recognise this denial in this way because of the analytic mode as revolt operating in his work. See Rollo May, Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence, (London: Souvenir Press,1972).
64 Although I am not able to explore this in any detail here it is interesting to note that the resistance to psychoanalysis can also take place within psychoanalytic societies themselves who she states “contribute to discrediting psychoanalysis, with their delicate politics and concern for safeguarding their clinical purity or, on the contrary, an overly aggressive ideological, if not spiritual, orientation, and thereby undermine the Copernican revolution that Freud introduced in the twentieth century and that we increasingly perceive to be the only one that does not turn away from either malady or the revolts of modernity.” See Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, (2002): 11. On this point of resistance to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic methods see Jacques Derrida, Resistances to Psychoanalysis, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
This is where we are: we can either renounce revolt by withdrawing into old values or indeed new ones that do not look back on themselves and do not question themselves or, on the contrary, relentlessly repeat retrospective return so as to lead it to the limits of the representable/thinkable/tenable (to the point of possession), limits made evident by certain advances of the culture of the twentieth century.\[65\]

**7.2.3 The Necessity for a Culture of Revolt**

Kristeva argues that to retreat to old values and norms uncritically is to retreat into an established defence mechanism and into the security that certitudes provide. This is to retreat into an existing logic or patterns of thought, associations and identifications that exist individually and collectively. Sjoholm describes this question of certitude as “an irreconcilable conflict between the subject-in-process and the normative order.”\[66\] Kristeva questions this certitude by posing the following question. She states that, “just under the surface of this question is another we could legitimately ask: what is the necessity of this culture of revolt?”\[67\] Kristeva provides an answer to this question. She states: “yet as a transformation of man’s relationship to meaning…cultural revolt intrinsically concerns public life and consequently has profoundly political implications. In fact, it poses the question of another politics, that of permanent conflictuality.”\[68\] This regenerated concept of politics as permanent conflictuality does not however eradicate antagonisms, conflicts, contradictions and ambiguity. As Noelle McAffee describes, it is “the potential for seeing difference as an ontological possibility for subjectivity.”\[69\] In Kristeva’s account it is to our own detriment to repress and deny a culture of revolt, or what McAffee describes as the ontological possibility within this new politics. Kristeva explores this by noting that when the other, the radical stranger or the foreigner is excluded and abjected from politics, and in the absence of a culture of revolt, they are forced to contend with regressive ideologies. These ideologies do not however satisfy their demands for rupture and regeneration of self, and moreover, inclusion. In such

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\[69\] Noelle McAffee, “Towards an Ethics of Respect” in Kelly Oliver, ed. *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*, (New York: Routledge, 1993): 131. This has already been emphasised in Nandy’s work in the ways in which his work confronts the positioning of the boundaries of politics.
For Kristeva their own complicity with their conditions of exclusion and abjection, leads them to become rioters. To counter these pathologies, politics as a culture of revolt for Kristeva must be understood rather in permanent conflictuality. In this account of politics, differenced, including the differences of the other are not abjected or reconciled but are lived with. In Intimate Revolt Kristeva affirms that “the diversity of cultural models is the only guarantee of respect for this humanity” for the other. As with Nandy for Kristeva the ability to afford humanity to the other is captured in the concept of hospitality. She tells us that, “hospitality should not be a simple juxtaposition of differences, with the domination of one model over all the others, but, on the contrary, a taking into consideration other logics, other freedoms, so that each ways of being becomes more multiple, more complex.” The culture of revolt captured in Kristeva’s reading of hospitality recognises multiple ways of being and of subjectivity. This culture fosters a new politics in which the boundaries of self and other are ruptured and regenerated. To support a culture of revolt is to therefore support the perpetual features of these processes of revolt. For Kristeva these perpetual processes of revolt define a culture of revolt that she advocates but more importantly preserves the future of revolt.

7.2.4 The Radical Evil of Standardisation and Homogenisation

In Kristeva’s account processes of revolt are what sustain our continual questioning or ourselves and the world around us. Preserving this capacity is vital, for it safeguards, against the pathologies of conformity, homogenisation and stagnation. Kristeva notes that foreclosing revolt and with it the possibility of psychic re-birth ultimately leads to the death of the subject. Within this account standardisation, homogenisation and stagnation thus takes on a deeper significance. This significance is
expressed for Kristeva in Hannah Arendt’s concept of “radical evil.” In Kristeva’s application of the concept radical evil denotes “the halting of representation and questioning.” Here radical evil is non-representation and non-questioning and consistent with Arendt’s depiction has its foundations in totalitarianism. For Kristeva, Arendt rightly acknowledges that totalitarianism is connected to complete domination. This domination includes psychic domination, and aims to eliminate essential features of our humanity, notably our capacities for questioning and representation. Kristeva states, “I can never sufficiently emphasize the fact that totalitarianism is the result of a certain fixation of revolt in what is precisely its betrayal, namely the suspension of retrospective return, which amounts to a suspension of thought.” To accept the halting of representation and questioning is to enter into a psychic state of totalitarianism, an internal stasis within psychic life. Therefore, our capacities to enter into processes of revolt, and cultivate a revolt culture become closed off by this radical evil. Kristeva repeatedly emphasises that this radical evil must be confronted and traversed in order to actuate the therapeutic effects and affects of revolt.

As I have sketched out, revolt references a series of psychoanalytic processes that rupture, regenerate and re-articulate meaning and signification. Like the analytic experience itself within the clinical setting revolt provides the subject in revolt with access to an autonomy of thought in questioning and challenging established meanings and norms. This autonomy extends to regenerating the boundaries of self as revolt leads us to a psychic re-birth. Revolt functions as a means of keeping psychic space and the Imaginary dynamic and safeguarding wellbeing within psychic life. Further, revolt functions in keeping the subject alive. The four features of revolt that I have highlighted in preserving this wellbeing within psychic life are: Firstly, retrospection or retrospective return as opening or sensitising us to the possibilities of anamnesis, for psychic re-birth and infinite re-creation; secondly, in confronting and traversing the internal conflicts and resistance which prevent these processes of rupture and regeneration from taking place in psychic life; thirdly, the necessity for a culture of

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76 Kristeva writes, “The permanence of contradiction, the temporariness of reconciliation, the bringing to the fore of everything that puts the very possibility of unitary meaning to the test (such as the drive, the unnameable feminine, destructivity, psychosis etc.): these are what the culture of revolt explores.” Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, (2002): 10.

revolt to preserve our internal capacities for thought and representation; which brings us to fourthly, that revolt safeguards against the radical evils of standardisation, homogenisation and conformity within meaning, language, thought and subjectivity. Drawing on aspects of Kristeva’s account I have emphasised that rupture and regeneration of meaning and signification (including the meanings and signification ascribed to self) are the features of revolt. In applying these features of revolt to describe the psychoanalytic mode operating within Nandy’s work, I further develop the psychotherapeutic features of this mode of critical intervention and dissent.

7.3 Recovery through Rupture and Regeneration: A Case for the Therapeutic

Revolt as a psychoanalytic concept denotes a series of processes that safeguard our capacities to rupture, question, confront, and work through established values, norms, and assumptions within psychic life. To this extent revolt regenerates meaning and significance, and, in doing so preserves what Kristeva notes is the wellbeing of psychic life. These processes lead to the goal of a psychic re-birth, and hence a regeneration of subjectivity, including the boundaries of self. This re-birth is confronting as much as it is therapeutic because it places us in revolt. The process of being in revolt also draws our attention to our own intimate radical alterity, or the stranger within that marks human subjectivity. This, as Noelle McAffee argues, develops “an ethics of respect for what cannot be known, for this irreconcilable difference.” This informs our ability to extend a hand to the other, having now been exposed to a more complex understanding of subjectivity and the inter-subjective realm.

These processes of rupture and regeneration are for Kristeva imbued with the possibility of infinite re-creation. There is a continuing internal dynamism, which resists the dangers and radical evil of homogenisation and stagnation within psychic life. This radical evil of homogenisation carries an additional weight. As Kristeva describes, the suspension of thought leads to the death of the subject. Further to this, Kristeva describes the relationship between abjection and revolt in the following way. Abjection is an affective state that threatens the subject-in-process with the disruption of being lost in the borderlands between subject and object. The suspension of revolt takes us further denoting the end of subjectivity. There is therefore, a therapeutic dimension operating in

revolt that preserves the integrity of subjectivity, including the dynamism or as Kristeva prefers, the timelessness of psychic life.

In applying Kristeva’s concept of revolt to describe the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work the therapeutic dimension reveals itself in two significant ways. Firstly, it reveals Nandy’s ability to actuate perspectives that sensitise us to the therapeutic processes of rupture and regeneration and re-articulation of meaning and signification. Secondly, the therapeutic reveals itself within Nandy’s identity and autonomy of thought that enables him as the critical analytic intellectual to actuate these perspectives. The two arguments are symbiotic. The symbiosis between Nandy’s identity and mode of critical intervention is not entirely unfamiliar. As previously argued, this relationship informs representations of Nandy in the debates on Indian secularism. Selected critics have demonstrated the ways in which this relationship is conceived in a politics of blame and expressed in symptomatic responses. Here the threat and disruption of Nandy’s intellectual position collapses into a more generalised threat and disruption that Nandy himself as the abject figure carries forward. Cast as the phobic object and with his abject status, his identity and mode of dissent is cast outside. Hence, Nandy is consistently represented as the not yet entitled subject.

What distinguishes this account of the relationship between subjectivity and the mode of dissent here? Simply stated these processes of revolt characterising Nandy’s mode of critical engagement and dissent exist outside of the symptomatic. Revolt as capturing intimate internal processes therefore; works to redirect the abjection against the self into processes of critical thought and questioning. For Kristeva, these processes provide the conditions for the transformation of social relations. This approach enables Nandy’s identity and autonomy of thought to be considered with greater complexity than the symptomatic allows. The critical idiom of his work provides the conditions for Nandy to rupture and regenerate meaning and signification, including the meaning of his own identity. He is able to remake his own subjectivity and in the process resist abjection. In and through these processes he also remakes his intellectual significance. This mode, a mode as revolt, is inherently dynamic and marked by an infinite re-creation; Nandy is able to re-create his subjectivity in very different terms. This also provides him with the capacity for self-reflexivity as an effect of this mode and which in

79 This has been explored in Chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation. Refer to these chapters in Part B, Reading the Politics of Blame.
turn informs his work. This has been detailed in terms of the betrayal he enters into in critiquing secularism. Although he claims this betrayal is entered into with “glee” it is not without its intimately confronting features. For in entering via this mode into processes of retrospection and anamnesis the, “…repetition of inner conflicts and critical analysis [is] necessary to overcome the instinctive and unconscious self-protective forces of forgetting, denying, projecting and similar defence mechanisms.”

Nandy’s internal confrontation takes place alongside a working through of these defence mechanisms. The expression of glee is therefore, more than just a reactionary and provocative position. It is a position that is arrived at through these intimate processes of retrospection, anamnesis and working through, in confronting these defence mechanisms. Kristeva describes the outcome of these processes as “speaking an other language… [and] is quite simply the minimum and primary condition for being alive.” If Nandy contends the secular ideal is defended by the intellectually lazy then this seemingly innocuous laziness takes on a deeper meaning. It signifies the reproduction of these defence mechanisms. This is especially the case for critics who may be sympathetic to Nandy’s argument, but who are unable to move through these deeply imbedded individual and collective defences. These defences are nonetheless complex for as argued they are intimately connected to selfhood, self-representation, but also to a contested national identity. Revolt in Kristeva’s account always makes painful demands on the self, on culture and on society. Kristeva continues that “to estrange oneself from oneself and to make oneself the smuggler of this continuously recaptured strangeness” are the conditions of revolt. These conditions have also been described by Cecilia Sjoholm as a transcendental intuition of the other, which she argues reveals itself as revolt. This intuition or recognition of the other and the other within, places Nandy in a psychic position from which to also recognise the subjectivity and humanity of the other.

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82 Vinay Lal has also spoken about the ways in which Nandy is dismissed as reactionary voice. See Christine Deftereos, “Conversations on Ashis Nandy: Vinay Lal with Christine Deftereos,” (Unpublished Interviews. New Delhi, India 2005): 1-60.
84 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 254.
85 Celia Sjoholm, Kristeva and the Political, (2005): 112.
Makarand Paranjape has come close to recognising the therapeutic dimension operating in Nandy’s intellectual identity and autonomy. Paranjape notes that Nandy’s “episteme is a modern one, but rather different from the predatory dominant versions.”

Grounded within the intellectual and ethical commitment to psychoanalysis this mode of critical intervention, despite representations of Nandy’s as culturalist and traditionalist, is a modern one. What is especially useful about Paranjape’s observation is that he understands Nandy to adopt an approach that differs from both a predatory and dominant version of modern critique. This observation is consistent with the account of revolt and its application to describe Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode; given that producing predatory and dominant perspectives is equated here with the suspension of thought. In the presence of revolt, and in Nandy’s case revolt is present in the operation of the psychoanalytic mode in his work, then this suspension of thought is just not possible. Nandy rejects the methods that lead to standardisation, homogenisation, and conformity, along with predatory and dominant discourses. As he states “dissent unless it seeks to subvert the rules of the game and the language, in which the rules are framed, becomes another form of conformity.”

As an intellectual who demonstrates the importance of rupture and regeneration Nandy’s work encourages a similar response from those who are able to recognise this invitation in his work.

Nandy’s identity and significance can be understood through the operation of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt in his work. This analytic mode produces a distinctive reflexive moment in his work. Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash acknowledge this as a feature of Nandy’s critique in their introduction to a collected edition of his work. They argue that, “these essays continue to challenge us, forcing us to ask ourselves new questions, even as they offer us guidance in the regeneration and re-enchantment of our own selves.”

In commenting on Nandy’s mode of critical intervention and consistent with the psychoanalytic mode as revolt, Nandy is able to actuate critical analytic perspectives that foster this reflexivity. This reflexivity invites us to replicate these processes of rupture and regeneration and of critical analytical thought. These perspectives confront and work through the established, dominant and

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89 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 1.
hegemonic norms, meanings and identities, in order to regenerate and re-articulate meaning and significance. Nandy’s work demonstrates a commitment to the therapeutic in the ways in which the recovery of alternatives takes place and is re-claimed as an openness in defiance of the certitudes. These perspectives we can also conclude lead to a recovery of alternatives not only for the self, but always and necessarily in tandem with a recognition of our own radical alterity and otherness. This reflexivity and awareness of otherness (including our own radical otherness) leads to a regeneration of self in relation to the other. More importantly for Nandy, it can lead to a new politics. For in assessing “the implications of the argument thus far,” Nandy consistent within the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt within his work proposes that, “…openness to voices, familiar or strange, may well have to the first criterion of the shared self which transcends nation-states, communities, perhaps even cultures themselves.”

“The political logic of revolt” actuated in Nandy’s work corresponds with what Vinay Lal notes are the “open futures” developed in Nandy’s writings. This notion of open futures references the outcome of processes of revolt. These futures can only be open when expressed in the therapeutic register. An example of the way Nandy demonstrates this intellectual and ethical commitment to the therapeutic is evident in his efforts to re-claim the concept of dissent through the metaphor of the shaman, which I will take up in the following section. This regenerated concept of dissent, consistent with the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt, is for Nandy also necessarily an exercise in the politics of awareness.

7.4 The Psychoanalytic Mode as Revolt: The Metaphor of the Shaman as Critical Intervention

In the essay “Shamans, Savages and Wilderness: On the Audibility of Dissent and the Future of Civilizations” Nandy develops the argument for the need to rupture and

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90 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 481; 472.

regenerate the concept of dissent. This is developed through the metaphor of the shaman. In reading this essay I ask to what extent the shaman functions within the essay as a figure in revolt. In Nandy’s reading the shaman is a figure who is located at the borderlands of society and the borderlands of psychic life. This location is privileged as it imbues the shaman with a sensitivity and capacity to challenge the politics of audibility and inaudibility operating in dissent. Nandy is however, not alone in acknowledging the critical and creative possibilities of the shamanic figure.

The shaman is celebrated as a disruptive figure by a number of contemporary thinkers notably within the work of anthropologists Claude-Levi Strauss and Michael Taussig and in the work of the Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar. Although each theorist explores the shaman and shamanism with a different theoretical problematic in mind, all these works explore the shaman as a radical figure that exists at the borderlines of society and culture. The shaman is also celebrated for being at borderline states of subjectivity and consciousness and unconsciousness life. For instance, in Levi-Strauss’ work shamanism shares a number of similarities with psychoanalysis. Levi-Strauss points out that shamanism, like psychoanalysis, aims to bring “to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious.”

For Kakar in his text exploring healing traditions in India, what shamanism and psychoanalysis have in common is that “they operate with collective and individual myths.” In both accounts this capacity of the shaman to access these myths, in order to work through unconscious tensions, conflicts and resistances is recognised as a creative and powerful source of critical regeneration. In both accounts it can also be argued the shaman is a figure in revolt against dominant social and cultural norms and practices. Michael Taussig has explored the shaman’s capacity for disruption and regeneration in his account of the shaman’s role in the colonial encounter. The shaman becomes central to challenging

92 Ashis Nandy, “Shamans, Savages and the Wilderness: On the Audibility of Dissent and the Future of Civilizations” Alternatives (XIV) (1989): 263-277. This essay is reprinted in Bonfire of Creeds and it is this version that is referenced in the discussion.
and confronting the homogenizing process of identification and signification within the colonialist gaze. Taussig’s ethnographic research details the ways in which the “wilderness” of the shaman, as a feature of subjectivity and agency, provides a disruption to colonialist modes of representation. This “wilderness” he argues, “challenges the unity of the symbol, the transcendent totalisation binding the image to that which it represents” which is ultimately “the death of signification.”⁹⁶ The strangeness of the shaman, including the wild non-rational and non-modern ways, are for Taussig similarly, a source of creativity and regeneration in the critical encounter.

In Nandy’s own analysis it is a combination of these equally disruptive and regenerative features of the shaman that are invoked in his application of this metaphor to theorise dissent. Nandy recognises that these capacities for sensitivity and openness collide with the shaman’s strangeness. It is in recognising and acknowledging the radical strangeness that activates the possibility for alternative imaginings of dissent. This is made possible because of the shaman’s capacity to speak in languages so foreign and unspeakable, that they are abjected from mainstream society. As an abject figure the shaman, therefore carries the disruptive threat of psychosis. This position of double estrangement demonstrated by the shaman imbues him/her with the capacity for revolt. “It is here,” in this double estrangement, “that we seek experiences of revolt.”⁹⁷ The shaman is a fitting metaphor for Nandy’s efforts to disrupt existing concepts of dissent and to redirect and regenerate the boundaries of dissent.

The operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt within the essay sensitises Nandy to these issues. It also enables him to generate a critical analytic perspective that ruptures and regenerates the concept of dissent. In Nandy’s depiction dissent has become foreclosed by the fixed boundaries that constitute what is audible. Nandy issues two warnings against the radical evil that is the suspension of thought. The first warning is levelled against the “particular narrow and specific form dissent has to take, to be audible or politically non co-optable in our times.”⁹⁸ Nandy laments that for dissent to be audible it must be articulated within a specific form and structure. It must comply with processes of conformity, homogenisation and stagnation in order for it to be heard. The question of the audibility of dissent draws our attention to the inclusions and

⁹⁶ “Wilderness challenges the unity of the symbol, the transcendent totalisation binding the image to that which it represents. Wilderness pries open this unity and in its place creates slippage…Wilderness is the death of signification.” Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, (1986): 219.


exclusions operating within the concept. For Nandy these boundaries are fixed and reinforced by the “global culture of commonsense.”99 He describes this in the following way:

And in that commonsense, this shared commons sense if you want to call it so, of the global urban middle class is one way to put it, it cuts across boundaries. It marks out a perimeter within which you operate even as a dissenter, and if you are inside this then you are a sane meaningful worthwhile opponent, then you are a true dissenter. And if you walk out of the perimeters, stay out of it, you are seen as a dissenter who is not only destructive but also not worth looking at because you are flouting the presumed axioms of sanity and rationality in some fundamental sense. And this is what I mean basically when I talk about the structure of global common sense.100

Another way of expressing this culture of commonsense is in relation to modernity. “Dissent,” Nandy warns, “To [even] qualify as dissent, must be fully translatable into the idiom of modernity.”101 While the audible features of dissent conform to dominant and hegemonic imaginings, Nandy’s analysis radically challenges this exclusion.

The second concern outlined in the essay is against the “strange inaudibility that plagues those who, by design or by default, have become citizens of the dominant global culture.”102 There is a link between the global subjects or global citizen, who in acquiring their global status has willingly and unwittingly, accepted these conditions of inaudibility. This inaudibility is symptomatic for Nandy of a global trans-cultural conformity and stagnation within the culture of modernity, and is not only cause for concern in India. Is not this inaudibility yet another manifestation of abj ecting the wilderness and strangeness of the shaman, thus rendering him outside of accepted


102 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 470.
dissent? For Nandy, this inaudibility can be understood as part of the defence mechanisms safeguarding the boundaries of dissent. However, what is problematic for Nandy is that the citizen’s inner capacity to rupture and regenerate these boundaries disappears from view. There is a loss of a critical capacity within the psychic life of the individual, and collectively within these cultures for imaginary and symbolic re-articulation. This condition confirms the dangers of suspension of thought.

The shaman operates in a similar way to Nandy’s account of the non-modern peripheral in Indian political culture, detailed in the discussion of his critique of secularism. Like the non-modern peripheral the shaman is illiterate in the language of modernity and is deemed threatening. Equally threatening is the shaman’s willingness to flout “the presumed axioms of sanity and rationality in some fundamental sense.” This illiteracy and inaudibility go hand in hand coinciding with a lack of political recognition for the non-modern peripheral as entitled subject. The shaman like the non-modern peripheral is afforded a similar status within public life. Nandy takes the metaphor of the shaman seriously in order to redress these concerns and regenerate the concept of dissent in social and political criticism. The shaman is a figure with the capacity to revolt against the homogenisation and standardisation of dissent. The ambiguous position of the shaman as neither an insider nor outsider, and represented with a capacity to access the non-rational is privileged. Nandy explains this in the following way, “coming out of a transformative experience, and then, claiming to be a testimony to another way of looking at reality and intervening in it, the shaman is a combination of a mystic healer and an exorcist who identifies demons – popular or unpopular, traditional or modern.”

For Nandy the shaman is a figure who is both exorcist and healer that he turns to. He/she is someone who is capable of rupture and someone who has access to regeneration and re-articulation and hence, to the therapeutic. These different ways of seeing therefore have the capacities to disrupt the particular form dissent takes within this global culture of commonsense. Through the figure of the shaman Nandy undertakes to radically undermine the conformity and stagnation within the concept, to displace this global culture of common sense, and in turn to work through the

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103 This has been discussed in Chapter 2, An Anti-Secular Manifesto? The Cultural and Psychological Viability of Secularism.
prescriptive limits of what constitutes audible dissent. Nandy recognises these tasks because of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating in his work. It is this mode that provides him with the sensitivity, like the shaman, to acknowledge that,

The recovery of other selves of cultures and communities, selves not defined by the dominant global consciousness, may turn out to be the first radical task of social criticism and political activism and the first responsibility of intellectual stocktaking in the first decades of the coming century. But that recovery may not be easy. As I have said, radical dissent today constantly faces the danger of getting organised into a standardized form.\footnote{Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 472.}

The recovery that is intellectually and ethically acceptable is to be found in these alternative accounts of individual and collective expressions of selfhood, which remain outside the view of a dominant collective consciousness. Nandy acknowledges the difficulty of activating these processes of revolt. This includes, as discussed, working through internal defences and resistances to change and in traversing internal stasis within psychic life.

Nandy explores the shaman as a “modest symbol of resistance to the dominant politics of knowledge.”\footnote{Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 472.} It is not therefore the heroic symbol of the shaman as the voice of “all non-co-optable dissent” that he explores.\footnote{Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 472.} This qualification is consistent with Nandy’s rejection of a single solution to the problematic of dissent. This solution is not possible given the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt within his work. As detailed the analytic mode precludes fixed solutions and the closure of the analytic mode in this way. For Nandy the shaman is a symbol of resistance that perpetually challenges, ruptures and regenerates. Society and culture though is often resistant, and also threatened by the shaman’s capacity for change. This can be explained by the fact that the figure of the shaman is already imbued with a number of existing and conflicting symbolic representations within societies. Existing at the borderlands of acceptability and non-acceptability, the shaman evokes a range of responses, as being esteemed and revered, to being a maligned abject figure. Notably, it is the popular image of the shaman as a witchdoctor, a figure with access to the strange and intimate

\footnote{Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, 472.}
within the self and within culture that is of interest here. In Nandy’s work the shaman has the capacity to actuate anamnesis or retrospective return into disavowed parts of individual and collective selfhood. This is possible given his/her ability to communicate within a number of different metaphysical realms. With “one foot in the familiar, one foot outside; one foot in the present, one in the future” the shaman represents a disruption to accepted norms of logic and time. The shaman is capable of the kind of “time travel to a possible self” that Nandy supports. This time travel includes access to cultural traditions, myths and the unconscious. These qualities lend themselves to processes of rupture and regeneration.

The question remains though, by whom is this mode of dissent recognised and heard? Nandy claims that shaman’s dissent is met with suspicion and resistance. As a figure in revolt, who engages with disavowed parts of the self and culture, the shaman’s identity and more importantly capacities will not always be represented within mainstream society. This is especially true of modern societies that devalue the mythopoetic, and therefore can only tolerate the shaman as a relic of the past. If he or she does manage to survive in such societies then their subjectivity will be “rationally” and “systematically” interpreted as “belonging to an earlier stage of the evolution of consciousness.” These representations reveal the threat and anxiety that the shaman provokes. Nandy notes that, “the shaman may even manage to survive in a historical society as a lunatic, a schizophrenic who should be psychiatrically committed or, if that becomes politically embarrassing, met with deafening silence.” The embarrassing and inaudible features that the shaman represents are nonetheless valued. It is this value that provides the shaman with the sensitivity and openness fundamental to Nandy’s mode of dissent. Further, this embarrassment can be contextualised within the symbolic function that the third world performs within western modernity.

There are however, distinct limits to the metaphor of the shaman. These limitations lay predominantly within the shaman’s fear of organised and structured dissent. In this sense “the shaman often is too anarchic, too individualistic and too suspicious of all formal political processes.” Yet this inability to conform to formal political processes is what preserves the shaman’s ability to maintain access to alternate

109 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 472.
112 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 473.
113 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 474.
languages, cosmologies and forms of consciousness. The shaman’s inability to conform demonstrates the psychoanalytic mode as revolt in Nandy’s essay. Like the shaman whose own mode of dissent is imbedded in a perpetual experience of revolt, Nandy too does not waiver in his commitment to a permanent analytic mode of dissent. The metaphor of the shaman performs an important symbolic function for a thinker and writer like Nandy committed to safeguarding the therapeutic. He reflects on this in the following way: “what is dissent if it has no place for the unknown, the childlike and the non-rational? And what is the intellectual’s job definition if it does not include the ability to be in a minority and at the borderlines of the knowable?”

Like the shaman, Nandy’s ability to exist at the borderlines of the knowable provides him with this sensitivity and openness to theorise dissent in these ways. For Nandy the boundaries of dissent do not necessarily disappear through this psychoanalytic mode as revolt, but that these boundaries are free from standardisation, homogenisation and conformity.

In this chapter I have introduced a number of concepts through which to further consider Ashis Nandy’s intellectual autonomy and significance. I have argued that the autonomy of thought that Nandy demonstrates in his critique of secularism, is an autonomy marked by a confrontation with the abject. However, this does not fully explain how Nandy is able to actuate these processes within his work. What the application of the abject does affirm though is Nandy’s intellectual and ethical commitment to a psychoanalytic framework. This commitment to psychoanalysis signposts his intellectual sensitivity to processes of internalisation and externalisation, to the ways in which the psychic life of power operates in politics and to a profound awareness for the positioning of the boundaries of subjectivity, and between secular and non-secular, public and private, self and other. To this we can also add Nandy’s sensitivity to positioning of the boundaries between the psychological and the political. As Chanter and Ziarek argue, “erupting along the fault lines of these supposedly discrete structures, abjection both constitutes and undermines the stable distinctions between the life of the psyche and the life of the polis.”

Nandy’s capacity to theorise along “the fault lines” between culture and the psyche, however, extends beyond his critique of secularism, and is also a distinct feature across his work.

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Nandy’s ability to rupture and regenerate the boundaries between culture and psyche is made possible through what I termed is a psychoanalytic mode operating in his work. I have characterised this mode through Kristeva's account of revolt, and claimed that this mode is an analytic mode as revolt. This analytic mode as revolt imbues Nandy and his work with certain features, namely his ability to resist abjection. Nandy, through this mode, is able to rupture and regenerate meaning and signification, and in the process reclaim and remake his subjectivity and agency as critic. Following Kristeva I introduced the concept of revolt, as intimate revolt. Revolt denotes more that just an analytic attitude of defiance here, by locating itself as a series of processes that activate and safeguard the analytic attitude from homogenisation, standardisation and conformity. These processes of retrospective return and anamnesis, creates a rupturing of norms, values, meanings and identities. Added to these processes are the regenerative possibilities not only in imaginary identifications but also symbolic transformation, in the possibility of transforming social relations. In applying these processes of revolt to describe the psychoanalytic mode, I have therefore, also situated Nandy’s identity, along with his work as being firmly situated within these concerns. As a critical analytic intellectual he actuates perspectives that affirm these processes of revolt as central to critical intervention and dissent. In Nandy’s mode of critical intervention there is also a reflexivity and self-reflexivity at play. To focus on the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt in Nandy’s work and in his identity is to move away from what the symptomatic and to enter into this psychotherapeutic register. In noting how the therapeutic is activated via the operation of the psychoanalytic mode in Nandy's work, I turned to consider the ways in which he analyses dissent through the metaphor of the shaman. In what follows I will argue that this psychoanalytic mode as revolt is a permanent feature in Nandy’s work and identity as critical analytic intellectual, whose work resists the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology. It is in the integrity and permanent features of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt that Nandy’s ability to resist abjection can be more fully appreciated.
Chapter 8:  
From Phobic Object to Psychoanalytic Mode:  
Resisting Abjection

In this chapter I provide two examples of Ashis Nandy’s work to detail the way the psychoanalytic mode of revolt operates. I have argued that this psychoanalytic mode as revolt enables Nandy to generate critical analytic perspectives that resist the effects of the distortions of dominant ideologies. The therapeutic aspect of this psychoanalytic mode reveals itself in Nandy’s ability to resist the effects of these distortions and in regenerating meaning and subjectivity. However, as Kristeva describes it is only by entering into these psychoanalytic processes of revolt, that this can be achieved. To this extent Nandy’s approach invites us to enter into processes of retrospective questioning, retrospective return and anamnesis. As Kristeva continues in her account of revolt, these processes confront, displace, and work through established norms, meanings, values, projections and introjections within psychic life. This invitation in Kristeva’s work and which I am suggesting is also present in Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode as revolt, is not without it own intensely confronting challenges.

For this invitation brings us face to face with complex and deeply imbedded defences and resistances within psychic life. These resistances must be worked through and worked out, in order to activate the therapeutic possibility of revolt. Revolt in this respect safeguards our wellbeing by challenging the radical evils of stagnation, homogenisation and conformity within psychic life. The therapeutic emerges then as an effect of this rupturing, to the incessant movement of revolt. The therapeutic finds expression through the processes of regeneration, in the infinite re-creation and psychic re-birth that is made possible through revolt.¹ According to Kristeva this psychic re-birth takes effect as a rupturing and regeneration of the boundaries of selfhood. From this regeneration of subjectivity a number of further possibilities then emerge; namely a changed relationship to the other, along with recognition of our own radical alterity. The therapeutic appears in these possibilities and alternatives, instituted at the level of the imaginary and re-articulated in the symbolic.

¹ The concept of regeneration and infinite re-creation, as a feature of Kristeva’s account of revolt has been explored in the previous chapter. See also Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
In applying this concept to describe the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work and in his identity as critic, Nandy too is able to rupture and regenerate subjectivity in the critical analytic perspectives that he generates. This capacity locates Nandy’s identity, his intellectual significance and autonomy of thought firmly inside these processes of revolt. Therefore, in suggesting that Nandy enters into these processes of revolt, as the method to generate social and political criticism, he ruptures and regenerates meanings, including the meanings attached to his own identity as critic. To this extent, the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt in his work provides him with the capacity to resist abjection. The therapeutic also appears in Nandy’s ability to re-direct the abjection towards the self into the transformation of social relations. This transformation takes place for Nandy in his re-positioning of the boundaries between self and other, psychological and political, public and private. This transformation includes the return of possibilities and alternatives in his work, as alternative meanings and aspects of selfhood, even latent aspects of self, are addressed in his work. On another level, I have also argued that the therapeutic is evident in the effects this psychoanalytic mode has on others. These effects include cultivating a reflexivity and self-reflexivity, in order to develop an awareness of the merits of these critical analytic perspectives. These effects also have the intended consequence of cultivating an analytic attitude previously described.

The two examples I explore in this chapter demonstrate Nandy’s commitment to this psychoanalytic mode of critical intervention. Further, these examples also demonstrate Nandy’s ability to resist abjection through this analytic mode as revolt operating in his work. The two examples are taken from different periods in Nandy’s intellectual life and also demonstrate the enduring features of his mode over time. On the surface both these examples appear to speak to very different issues, themes and readerships. A case can be made that these differences denote a range within Nandy’s œuvre that should be celebrated according to the criteria of intellectual breadth and depth; criteria which not unusually supports scholarly profiles. While I am not discounting the significance of Nandy as an intellectual who as Vinay Lal notes, “Has

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2 For instance commentators acknowledge that Nandy’s work invites them to question themselves, in addition to address the theoretical challenges Nandy poses in his work. See Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash in “Introduction: A Dialogue with Ashis Nandy,” in Ashis Nandy, Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2004).

contributed in very distinct ways to certain kinds of conversations on a very large number of subjects,” it is the distinctiveness of his contribution which is being characterised here.⁴ I am detailing a more focused concern. Nandy’s distinctiveness within the scope of this dissertation is being explored in terms of the psychoanalytic approach. This constitutes a more narrow focus reflected by Nandy’s emphasis on human subjectivity. He states,

Frankly, many people tell me about the range of my work, so many things. But actually it is…I would think the range is somewhat narrow in the sense that my primary concern has always been human subjectivity. What makes a human being click? What makes him a master? What makes him a creative artist? What are the inner dynamics of a person? What or how is the person configured? How is the self configured? That has always been my primary interest and in that sense my concerns are not really changed because it is only in a different condition or context that I am looking at it. And even within that you might have noticed that I have always been fascinated by two broad areas of human endeavour: human destructiveness and human potentialities. These two extreme areas; and human potentialities including human creativity, and much of my work flows from this as an oscillation between these two.⁵

Nandy affirms his psychoanalytic focus, but consistent with this psychoanalytic mode does so through his commitment to working with and working through the complexities of human subjectivity. In focusing on both human destructiveness and human creativity Nandy self-represents his work as being produced from these two analytic positions. Equally significant are the ways in which Nandy engages with a concept of self. The concept of self, subject to the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt in his work, is understood as an infinite recreation. Therefore, the therapeutic effects of Nandy’s work are in the regeneration and re-articulation of selfhood.

The two examples discussed in this chapter illustrate how the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operates as a permanent feature of Nandy’s work. These examples

written over twenty years apart demonstrate the consistency and integrity of his mode of critical intervention. The first example is Nandy’s analysis of the loss and recovery of self within the context of colonialism. This is developed in one of Nandy’s most well known texts The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism published in 1983. The text is well received in a number of intellectual circles but has particular resonance within studies of postcoloniality and postcolonial studies.\(^6\) What is notable about the example is that the same psychoanalytic mode continues to produce critical analytic perspectives today, in the same ways as it has in this earlier point of Nandy’s intellectual life. The text radically confronts colonial fantasies of a Western modern and progressive ego ideal operating in colonialist ideology. Nandy radically ruptures and regenerates the positioning of the boundaries between colonial subject and object, coloniser and colonised, perpetrator and victim.\(^7\) Nandy reconfigures colonialism in terms of the subject’s conflicting relation to the other within, an enemy who is intimate. In this reading colonial power as having psychic dimensions this enables Nandy to further explore the possibility of rupture and regeneration, as both internal and external processes. These are addressed in The Intimate Enemy by re-imagining individual and collective resistance, liberation and self-affirmation alongside questions of cultural survival. The operation of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt therefore actuates this possibility of another structuring of subjectivity, for the individual and for these societies. This regeneration of subjectivity is vital to the recovery that Nandy is interested in re-claiming. This recovery is demonstrated by the

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\(^6\) The popularity of this text within the trans national debates of the conditions of postcoloniality, especially within postcolonial studies, has led to Nandy being praised within these circles. This appraisal has also led to the appropriation of his intellectual identity and intellectual significance as a leading voice within postcolonial studies. Vinay Lal has pointed out the complexities underpinning these appraisals and rightly questions this association. Lal states, “You see I think there is a kind of overwhelming impression, I think down to the present day that Ashis is one of the leading figures in what today passes as Postcolonial Theory. Now it is true in a certain way and yet it is not true at all.” Christine DeFtereos, “Conversations on Ashis Nandy: Vinay Lal with Christine DeFtereos,” (2005): 5. I have also developed a similar response in attempting to work through these complexities in previous research work undertaken for my Masters dissertation. Christine DeFtereos, Thinking Outside the Postcolonial Canon: A Critique of the Postcolonial Scholar, (Masters Thesis: The Ashworth Program in Social Theory. Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 2002): 1-81.

\(^7\) In commenting on what I read is an affectation of the operation of the analytic mode in Nandy’s work Makarand Paranjape makes the following comments: “That consistently Nandy advocates a third way (that of the non-player) the way of reconciliation and compassion, of bearing witness and assuming responsibility, even of courage and self-sacrifice, to the point when both the victors and the vanquished may be transformed, seeing themselves in a new light.” See Makarand Paranjape, “In the Interstices of Tradition and Modernity: Exploring Ashis Nandy’s Clandestine and Incommunicable Selves,” in Vinay Lal, ed. Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures: The Multiple Selves and Strange Destinations of Ashis Nandy. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
possibilities and alternatives throughout the text that safeguard individual and collective psychic life from the dangers of stagnation, homogenisation and conformity.

The second example that I explore in this chapter demonstrates the integrity and consistency of Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode over time within the very different context of public debates. These debates are entered into in a selection of five newspaper articles written in 2005-2007 and published in The Times of India, a national daily broadsheet printed in English. In these articles Nandy continues via the operation of this mode to rupture and regenerate official imaginings of an Indian nation and Indian self. In these articles Nandy radically confronts power relations in order to re-articulate the inclusions and exclusions in Indian culture. The rupture and regeneration of national fantasies draws our attention to the complexity of challenging dominant and fiercely defended concepts of national identity and national integration. This is evidenced by the topics covered by Nandy in these articles. These articles demonstrate Nandy’s commitment to the recreation of Indian accounts of selfhood not mediated by the Indian nation state. This regeneration also includes the possibility of recognising modes of suffering and trauma, subjective and inter-subjective experiences rendered invisible by a dominant national imaginary. Even within the brief scope of these newspaper articles and at these moments of forced engagement, Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode of critical intervention maintains its integrity and moreover, an autonomy of thought. The purpose of reading these five articles then is not to evaluate the alternative imaginaries offered but rather to note the consistency in which each article demonstrates Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode as revolt, and in turn his capacity via this mode to produce these alternatives.

8.1 **Loss and Recovery of Possible Selves: The Revolt against The Intimate Enemy**

*The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (1983)* explores the cultural and psychic processes that take form through the psychic life of colonialism. This is a colonialism that colonises minds. As the text affirms it is a colonialism that survives according to the complex rhythms of psychic life, as an intimate enemy well after the demise of empires. This is a colonialism that in Nandy’s account won its “great victories not so much through its military and technological

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8 These topics include that nationalist impulses underpinning the game of cricket; the naming of national cities; the birth of the Indian Nation State and the traumas of Partition.
prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the
traditional order.” It is a colonialism that succeeded in restructuring imaginary and
symbolic forms of identification, processes of subjection, in instituting new forms of
social relations and in shifting cultural priorities. For the individuals, cultures and
societies involved, this resulted in the internalisation of the West as a dominant
psychological category, or political imaginary. The text is an invitation to explore the
ways in which human subjectivity and the subjectivity of these societies was shaped by
these cultural and political conditions. Consistent though with the operation of the
psychoanalytic mode as revolt the invitation by Nandy necessarily denotes both a
rupture and re-articulation of these very conditions, and how they may be understood.

The mode of revolt does not however, entail demystifying the colonial condition
in order to reveal the truth of this condition. In contrast to the theorist Frantz Fanon who
has already exposed “the truth” as a Manichean reality, Nandy radically destabilises
accepted meanings of the colonial experience, including the conditions of psychological
subjugation. Rather there is a distinctive rejection of modes of critical intervention that
seek to counter or redress such imbalances. To enter into an oppositional logic to
counter that, which is revealed, can easily be co-opted into replicating existing forms of
dominance and standardisation. In replicating the internal logic existing within the
cultural and psychological pathologies of colonialism can only return us to what Nandy
describes are tragic-comic distortions. In claiming that the damaging and destructive
effects of colonialism were more harshly experienced by the colonisers than the
colonised, he radically disrupts accepted boundaries between coloniser, colonised;

University Press, 1983): ix
10 I have already referenced Judith Butler’s account of processes of subjection and these processes operate
in the psychic life of power. Here I am nothing that that within the psychic life of colonialism these
processes are also present, consistent with Nandy’s aptitude for these analytic concerns.
11 Therefore, there is a point of differentiation which can be made between the work of Fanon and Nandy
distinguishable by the operation of different analytic modes within their work. Nandy’s own objection to
Fanon’s work is detailed in the text in terms of the articulation of this mode, and the re-production of an
existing logic. For instance he writes that, “Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the
West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean-Paul Sartre.” Ashis Nandy, The
Intimate Enemy, (1983): xii. In relation to the differences between Fanon and Nandy, which can not be
developed more fully here, I also recognise that my reading of revolt and its application to describe an
analytic mode operating in Nandy’s work, differs from Ewa Ziarek’s efforts to work out the political
logic of revolt within Fanon’s work. See Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, “Kristeva and Fanon: Revolutionary
Violence and Ironic Articulation,” in Tina Chanter, T. and Ewa Ziarek, eds., Revolt, Affect, Collectivity:
12 Nandy suggests that this internal logic has dominated anti-colonial thought, and anti-colonial
movements, that have sought to redress this power dynamic through a counter response, that replicates a
colonial logic.

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perpetrator, victim; self and other. In Nandy’s reading it is the coloniser as a self-destructive co-victim that subverts the psychological, social and political conditions of colonialism. To not recognise the degradation of the coloniser, his own loss of self, loss of psychic wellbeing and loss of humanity, is to replicate the colonialist fantasy of the superiority of the oppressor. The fantasy of the coloniser’s moral, political, economic and psychological superiority is traversed throughout the text. In recognising that both the coloniser and colonised were victims of this punitive and overwhelming psychology, Nandy recasts colonialism as “a battle between the de-humanized self and the objectified enemy.”

The analysis confronts and “works through” images of an Indian colonialism defined by its British victors and their oppressed Indian counterparts, by turning to the internal psychic experiences within the self and within these societies. Therefore accounts of selfhood, self-esteem and self-affirmation, identifications, projections and representations are the entry points into the psychic life of colonialism. In Nandy’s analysis this survives within the complexities and contradictions of human subjectivity of both the coloniser and colonised.

In the text Nandy traverses the narcissistic fantasies of a centrally located colonial power, primarily in two ways. Firstly, by confronting and radically questioning the positioning of the boundaries between colonisers and colonised. He does this by emphasising the loss of self, and loss of humanity experienced by both perpetrators and victims. The loss of the self transcends the distinction between colonisers and colonised, given the psychic costs involved and internalised by the colonisers. This loss of self was internalised within British culture and had its own complex set of cultural pathologies to work through. In doing so, Nandy displaces the authoritarianism of colonialist ideology along with its hyper-masculine forms of identification. Secondly, this enables him to work through and regenerate the self’s destructive and violent relationship to the other, including identifying with the aggressor. Implicit within this task is the exploration of psychological resistance to this colonisation of the self, along with questions of cultural survival. The text focuses on these internal modes of resistance and resilience (internal to the self and to culture) that not only survive but which challenge the meanings of colonisation in profound ways. Taking “the ideas of psychological resistance to colonialism seriously” as Nandy acknowledges is an ethical commitment to preserving

our own intimate critical faculties.\textsuperscript{14} This commitment is all the more imperative in light of the dangers of the nineteenth century dream of the one world that for Nandy continues to, “haunt(s) us with the prospect of a fully homogenized, technologically controlled, absolutely hierarchised world, defined by polarities like the modern and the primitive, the secular and non-secular…”\textsuperscript{15}

The challenge is to rupture and regenerate this homogenising, standardising and stagnant political imagining. Nandy’s analysis ruptures and regenerates the polarities between colonisers and colonised by reconstituting accounts of selfhood and opening us to alternative accounts of subjectivity. The displacement and reconstruction of subjectivity that Nandy enters into via this mode is though not simply a counter-response to dominant colonialist ideals. The response that the text validates as ethically acceptable is a far more complex undertaking. The disruption to these ideals is actuated through a revolt resulting in the traversal of colonial fantasies, the negativisation of a hyper-masculine and aggressive colonialist ego, and the affirmation of non-violence. This process is what Kristeva might note is a form of ethical respect for the other and their humanity, emanating from internal transformations within the self. This latter point is significant to the operation of the psychoanalytic mode. For as Nandy warns, to reproduce structures of violence or to make a case for the creative and psychotherapeutic possibilities within violence reproduces modes of dissent based on identification with the aggressor.\textsuperscript{16} Such identifications work to reinforce an existing structure of defences, thus creating what Nandy elsewhere has termed is a second-order reality of domination, subjugation and subjection.\textsuperscript{17} Even “when in opposition, that dissent remains predictable and controlled” and ultimately does little to regenerate existing patterns of identification and signification.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, xii.
\textsuperscript{15} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, x.
\textsuperscript{16} On the creative and psychotherapeutic possibilities of violence, which are qualified in particular ways and actuated as an important form of redress and re-articulation of selfhood in Fanon’s work see Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
\textsuperscript{17} Ashis Nandy, \textit{The Intimate Enemy}, (1983): xii.
\textsuperscript{18} Ashis Nandy, \textit{Ibid.}, xii.
8.1.1 The Rhythms of Rupture

Nandy carries forward his commitment to rupturing established certitudes meanings and associations. He does this by instructing the reader that the text can be read as a cautionary tale. While “conventional anti-colonialism can be an apologia for the colonization of minds,” an alternative account can challenge modes of conformity and standardisation. Nandy can distinguish himself from these perspectives with a psychoanalytic mode of critical intervention that displaces existing meanings, and the meanings attached to subjectivity. In doing so, he unequivocally aligns his work within a more fluid and open critical tradition, as a rupturing and regeneration of ideas, meaning and modes of critical intervention. What is made possible through the operation of the psychoanalytic mode is “to speak of the plurality of critical traditions and of human rationality,” that his analysis affords. He notes that, “even if this sounds hopelessly like another case of unresolved counter-transference, I hope this book contributes to that stream of critical consciousness: the tradition of reinterpretation of traditions to create new traditions.”

Traversing the fantasy of a homogenised world where polarities between [coloniser/colonised, self/other, victimiser/victimised, masculine/emasculated, adult/childlike] must be confronted is pivotal to his contribution to “critical consciousness.” This critical consciousness is also central to the re-positioning of the boundaries between self and other that Nandy makes within the text. In recognising the alterity that exists within subjectivities and the fluidity in self-definitions of Indianness provides the entry point for this reconfiguration of the self and other. It is in working through the loss and recovery of self that these relationships can be re-imagined and re-constituted. Rupturing these relationships is though a disruptive process. Consequently Nandy intentionally represents a “distorted view” of Indian historical narrative. If Nandy’s psychoanalytic interest is in processes of retrospective questioning made possible through anamnesis, then the concept of time is also subject to the temporalising timelessness of psychic life. Time is radically displaced from a Historical linear frame and now subject to the rhythms of psychic life. If, as Nandy declares, the intention is to

19 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., x
20 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xvii.
21 He states that “when psychological and cultural survival is at stake, polarities such as the ones discussed here do break down and become partly irrelevant, and the directness of the experience of suffering and spontaneous resistance to it come through at all planes.” Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 113.
22 Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, (1983): xii. For a discussion of these possible dates for the commencement of colonialism in India see Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xvi.
explore “the cultural and psychological strategies which have helped [Indian] society to survive the experience [of colonialism]” then the past, present and future collapse into one frame. There is also confrontations with historicism, as Nandy does not hesitate to declare the essays in the text “to be an alternative mythography of history which denies and defies the [very] values of history [itself].”

The Intimate Enemy demonstrates the proximity or intimacy between the past, present and future by resisting a linear narrativisation of these experiences with colonialism. Nandy in acting these processes of anamnesis, of retrospective return and questioning does so as means of reconstituting these relationships. This aptitude for internal questioning is supplemented by cultural traditions and Indian accounts of human subjectivity that for Nandy, already carry forward the possibility of re-interpretation and re-construction. For example, he cites that in the case of the Indian folk historian with an understanding of the Indian concept of fatalism, there can be no real disjunction between the past and present. He confirms that “the Indian’s past is always open; whereas his future is so only to the extent that is a rediscovery or renewal.” Is the Indian subject then, as depicted here with a tacit understanding of fatalism a figure in revolt? We may very well ask whether the text is a commentary on the ways in which the Indic civilisation is a culture of revolt? Nandy’s approach beckons us to ask such questions and therefore, creates a rupturing.

The instability in meaning that Nandy plays with via this mode of analysis is also reflected in the structure of the text. The Intimate Enemy comprises two long essays; the first titled “The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India,” and the second, “The Unconscious Mind: A Post-Colonial View of India and the West.” The feeling of interruption and movement in the text is enhanced by the subdivision of these essays into shorter and seemingly disparate parts. There is a disruptive quality in the structure of the text which does not adhere to a linear logic of re-telling, but rather, is woven and interwoven with a multitude of narratives. The text reads more like a

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23 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xvi.
24 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xv. The referencing of myth is interesting because it suggests an altogether different organisation of time. Nandy notes that myths on the one hand allow one access to the processes which constitute history at the level of the here-and-the-now. Consciously acknowledged as the core of a culture, they widen instead of restricting human choices.” See Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 59
25 For a discussion of this refer to Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 58. According to the Indian concept of fatalism in the past there are open choices. The past is understood in more fluid terms, open to the reconstruction of that past in terms of a new past or alternative determined future (a new fatalism.)
26 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 59.
series of vignettes, as Nandy references a variety of protagonists, materials and examples ranging from historical figures, psycho-biographical accounts, life-histories, novels, myths and traditional texts. He therefore oscillates between working with Western and Indian figures, texts, traditions, folkways, myths and personal narratives in order to displace the psychology of colonialism, along with a given idiom of dissent. What is consistent throughout the text is Nandy’s focus on human subjectivity as the site of revolt.

While a number of theorists have commented on these processes as a form of hybridisation, the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt is indicative of a different level of complexity. For example, Arif Dirlik argues, “Nandy utilizes hybridities produced by the colonial encounter as a means to the rediscovery and recovery of authentic pasts.”27 In contrast to this reading, hybridisation can be understood as an effect of this mode, in rupturing and re-instituting possibilities and alternatives. Further, these processes of rediscovery cannot be a return to an authentic past or the re-claiming of an authentic Indianness because revolt forecloses the fixity of meaning. Rather, it is in returning to the conditions of this authentic past, and activating retrospective questioning that leads to a possible psychic rebirth of that past. To accept the invitation into this mode of thinking then is to accept that the voice of the author and the analysis offered cannot be understood or articulated within a language of certitudes. It is to accept that this mode of analysis is also a rupturing and regeneration of methods of interpretation through which the possibility of transformation can continue.

Nandy invites the reader into the psychoanalytic mode of “the savage outsider who is neither willing to be a player or counter-player.”28 But we may well ask who this non-player is, who is privileged within the text? And again is this not a figure capable of accessing and actuating processes of revolt? This is the non-player who not only resists and survives within this culture but also does so by preserving his/her internal capacities for re-imagining his/her own selfhood and their society’s selfhood differently.29 For Nandy whilst “translating and commenting on their West’s, these outsiders have smuggled in their own imageries, myths and fantasies.”30 The text therefore celebrates this possibility of instituting an alternative imaginary that not only survives within these

29 Nandy’s analysis of this survival applies to both the colonising and colonised cultures.
accounts of selfhood, but which resists, confronts and reconfigures the dominant parts of self. This capacity for the fluid interplay between what Nandy terms are dominant and latent parts of the self are fundamental to the wellbeing within psychic life and within culture. What is valued here is the displacement that takes place in meaning when this “fidelity to one’s inner self, as one translates, and to one’s inner voice, when one comments” can and does survive. The examples below affirm the ways this psychoanalytic mode as revolt actuates and institutes alternative meanings, imaginings and representations of the colonial experience.

8.1.2 Loss of Self: Whose loss and how?

Nandy details at length the cultural pathologies that resulted from the experience of colonialism. In the first essay “The Psychology of Colonialism” the reordering of Indian culture is explored through the importation of British concepts of sex and age. The importation of these concepts and the processes of subjection operating in colonial ideology reconstituted an existing traditional order and social code. This “homology between childhood and the state of being colonized that a modern colonial system invariably uses” was effective because it resulted in a distinctive change over time in consciousness. Nandy claims that there were far more fluid understandings of masculinity and femininity, in Hindu texts, myths and epics. These accounts have a long critical tradition of the inter-play between masculine and feminine and were replaced by new forms of identification. The concepts of purusatva (the essence of masculinity) naritva (the essence of femininity) and kibatva (the essence of hermaphroditism or emasculation,) were radically undermined by colonial ideology and reconstituted by a masculine ego ideal, which the coloniser and colonial order exemplified. The new forms of identification that became central to colonial India resulted in the polarities between masculinity and femininity being supplanted by the antonyms of masculinity and kibatva. This “femininity-in-masculinity was now perceived as the final negation of a man’s political identity, a pathology more dangerous than femininity itself” within colonial culture. Loss of self reveals itself through this now greatly compromised account of masculinity. What the text laments is the loss of possibility available in process of identification within accounts of human subjectivity. In reconstituting

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31 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., xiii.
32 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 11.
33 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 8.
masculinity within an aggressive ego ideal, the effeminate Hindu ego, with his undifferentiated masculinity and supplemented by his child-like features, provided the psychological conditions through which to reorganise Indian subjectivity. This process also re-affirmed the colonial fantasy of the superiority of the coloniser. The inner conflict caused by this now truncated imago, is for Nandy well documented, including within literature. This is evident for example in novels such as Rabindranath Tagore’s Car Adhay, where the heroic protagonist details his own personal movement away from his own categories of identification for political assertion. In Tagore’s novel, the protagonist takes on these characteristics of hyper-masculinity instrumentally, but ultimately to his own detriment and loss of self. Whereby the re-assertion of hyper masculinity not only confirms political identity and valorises the subject but provides the condition for what Nandy calls, “a second-order legitimacy to what in the dominant culture of the colony had already become the final differentiate of manliness: aggression, achievement, control, competition and power.”

The Intimate Enemy explores the ways that subjectivity organised around this ego ideal, along with the theory of progress was able to legitimise colonialism by reconstituting the human life cycle. Within this account the possibilities for self-constitution are greatly truncated. Nandy demonstrates the two responses available to the Indian subject within this psychology of colonialism. The first is from the child-like Indian and the second from the childish Indian, though both responses were subject to the colonialist fantasy of reform, development and progress. In the first instance the innocent child like Indian whose characteristics included an ignorant, masculine, loyal and corrigeable disposition it is claimed could be reformed through processes of westernisation, modernisation and Christianisation. The second response from the childish Indian, who represented an ungrateful, sinful, savage, disloyal and thus incorrigible, required a repression of this childish disposition “by controlling rebellion, ensuring internal peace and providing tough administration and rule of law.” This psychology was supported by a number of figures that complied with this colonial culture such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt who sought to redefine popular Hindu mythology to fit the changing values under colonialism. Such figures may have

34 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 9.
35 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 16
36 For a discussion of such figures refer to Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 19-23. Another example being Rammohun Roy whose aggressive criticism of Indian traditions was in the style of the major reform movement of India. As Nandy argues, “it was not merely an attempt to explain Indian culture in Indian terms, or even
contributed to the cultural and political definitions of selfhood, but these accounts of selfhood did little to preserve self-esteem and cultural autonomy, or in other words, individual and collective wellbeing. The text therefore applauds those who tried to “break out of this stagnation” by noting the rupturing of this political imaginary, by individuals who sought to create a new political awareness. The restoration of awareness can be read here as an effort to rupture and regenerate a stagnant Imaginary. Nandy cites Iswarchandra Vidyasagar as a figure who sought to create a new political awareness “which would combine a critical awareness of Hinduism and colonialism with cultural and individual authenticity.” Such interventions or ruptures into this psychology and culture of colonialism are important for regenerating our understandings of loss of self. These ruptures are also important for understanding the psychological resistance that Nandy reads into Indian culture.

Another aspect to this loss of self is in the radical claim made within the text that the coloniser was a co-victim within these processes. Notably what demonstrates the operation of the psychoanalytic mode, as revolt is this invitation to the reader to enter into the mindset and culture of those equally, if not more so overwhelmed by the experience of being colonial rulers. It is in “the less well known cultural and psychological pathologies produced by colonization in the colonizing societies” that Nandy explores that the rupture and displacement of the colonial experience is best exemplified. Nandy regenerates our understanding of colonialism by exploring four cultural pathologies that indicate that the “long term cultural damage colonialism did to the British society was greater.” These pathologies included that the colonial order and hierarchy, though in a modified form also applied to British society. Within the society of the coloniser the pathologies created a false sense of cultural homogeneity that is perpetuated by what Nandy terms is an underdevelopment of self. Despite this underdevelopment within individual and collective subjectivity this still encouraged the

in Western terms, but as an attempt to explain Indian culture in Indian terms, or even in Western terms, but as attempt to explain the West in Indian terms and to incorporate it in the Indian culture as an unavoidable experience.” See Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 22.

37 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 27.
38 He continues that “his was an effort to protect the not the formal structure of Hinduism but its spirit, as an open, anarchic federation of sub-cultures and textual authorities which allowed new readings and internal criticisms.” Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 27.
39 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 32.
40 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 32.
“colonizers to impute to themselves magical feelings of omnipotence and permanence.”\(^{41}\)

### 8.1.3 Internal Resistances to a Dominant Colonial Order

The *Intimate Enemy* takes the displacement of the coloniser further by looking at four different responses to these cultural pathologies. Nandy radically disrupts the fantasy of a unified colonial ego, by focusing on four different British figures and their experiences with colonialism. Nandy also differentiates Indian experiences from the experiences of these Westerners.\(^{42}\) The figures of Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell, Oscar Wild and Charles Freer Andrew each represent a particular response to the internalisation of colonialism within British society. Each in different ways radically displaces the assumption of an integrated colonial ego as each figure deals with the internalisation of colonialism differently. Nandy distinguishes the first two responses by Kipling and Orwell as coming from a direct or indirect exposure to the colonial situation. He suggests that Kipling and Orwell struggled with ideas of authority, responsibility, psychological security, self-esteem, hierarchy, power and evangelism. Kipling capturing the “pathetic self-hatred and ego constriction which went with colonialism and the latter [Orwell] the relative sense of freedom and critical morality which were the true antithesis of colonialism and which one could acquire only by working through the colonial consciousness.”\(^{43}\) Wilde and the other members of the Bloomsbury group responded indirectly to colonialism and were not as self-conscious. Andrews represents a “numerically small but psychologically significant response of many who wholly opted out of their colonizing society and fought for the cause of India.”\(^{44}\) Kipling is also the subject of a more detailed psychobiography in the second essay of the *Intimate Enemy*, where he is lauded as “the most creative builder of the political myths which a colonial power needs to sustain its self-esteem.”\(^{45}\) According to Nandy, Kipling’s image of the colonial subject is however, riddled by resistance, self-hatred, conflict and repression. Kipling is depicted as someone who resisted and


\(^{42}\) Nandy states that “in the case of the Indians I seem to have stressed texts and myths; for Westerners, people.” This too is significant for it points to the ways in which “some cultures [are] primarily organized around historical time intersecting with life-histories, and others around the timeless time of myths and texts.” See Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 48.


consistently fought to disown in self-hatred an aspect of his self identified as Indianness. For Nandy, the new myths, which Kipling produced about the civilising mission of colonialism is understood as part of the assertion of selfhood. Nandy argues that, “the pathology of the westernised Indian’s personality, which Kipling so cleverly identified, was rooted in India’s encounter with the ego-ideals of Kipling in the first place.” It is Kipling’s investment in the fetishised colonialist stereotypes as effeminate, childlike and savage that also reaffirms an aspect of Kipling’s own authenticity, as well as his subjectivity. For Nandy Kipling’s response to colonialism demonstrates a disavowal of his identity. In contrast to this account of self, Orwell’s response and resistance is an effort to address this disavowal. If Kipling’s efforts were to conceal and repress parts of selfhood then Orwell’s resistance was to articulate these openly, becoming an astute critic of the dominant middle-class culture central to the colonialism.

Nandy argues the third response was a protection and defence against the more feminine aspects of British self. This is evidenced in the figure of Wilde and the politicisation and subsequent criminalization of his sexual identity. The creativity of this response, which Nandy acknowledges, lies in the ways in which the dominance of hyper-masculinity was resisted against. Wilde’s controversy and his marginality were reinforced “by demonstratively using his homosexuality as a cultural ideology” which “threatened to sabotage his community’s dominant self-image as a community of well-defined men.” Andrews’ response and resistance to colonialism is expressed in his religiosity and non-conformity to British society. What is interesting about the depiction of Andrews is that he carries the weight of a double identity which Nandy values. Andrews was, as Nandy claims, marked by the ambivalence of being an Indian at heart and at the same time a true Englishman. Andrews developed a critique of British colonialism and mode of resistance informed by Christian ethics as much as it was by the classical universalism of Rabindranath Tagore and the folk-based critical traditionalism of Gandhi. For Nandy, in each of these responses to colonialism, the concept of resistance is displaced and regenerated though these life histories and experiences. It is in turning to the question of subjectivity and the internalisations within psychic life that resistance is located, and also ruptured and regenerated.

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8.1.4 Recovery or “Liberation for Those Who do not Speak the Language of Liberation”

I have noted that the figure of the non-player, as a subject in revolt is valued within *The Intimate Enemy*. The value of this subject position becomes all the more apparent when questioning the concept of liberation. Consistent with Nandy’s mode of critical engagement the value of the non-player is also apparent in his/her ability to recover self. Within the text the non-player confronts the cultural pathologies of colonialism by entering into a series of displacements of “the dyadic relationship” between the rulers and ruled, coloniser and colonised, victimiser and victim. The non-player confronts the complex defences underpinning these relationships, namely in identifying with the aggressor. In resisting this process of identification the non-player demonstrates a capacity to traverse the colonial fantasy of the superiority of the coloniser. Nandy privileges the non-player in this scenario because of his/her ability to recognise two crucial tensions at play. These are: firstly, in acknowledging the loss of self and loss of humanity that the colonial fantasy perpetuates and secondly, in acknowledging the need to regenerate the concept of recovery and/or liberation. The loss of self that takes place at a cost as the constitution and articulation of self is truncated by the categories and processes of identification already in place by colonial ideology. The loss of self and loss of humanity, which Nandy explores, represents the processes of standardisation and homogenisation of subjectivity and psychic life. For Nandy the aim, “of the oppressed should be, not to become a first-class citizen in the world of oppression instead of a second – or third-class one, but to build an alternative world where he can hope to win back his humanity.” The recovery of self that Nandy’s mode of analysis enters into and which is ethically acceptable is intimately tied to winning back this humanity. The concept of humanity is located within psychic life and tied to the capacities to think and imagine something different by reconfiguring subjectivity. The only recovery or liberation that for Nandy is therefore ethically

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48 I have already made this point in the previous chapter in discussing Nandy’s efforts to re-constitute dissent through the metaphor of the shaman. Nandy argues within that essay that there is a “language and world-view of those who refuse – or unable – to speak the language of change, history, revolution and liberation who nonetheless, in their own way and with the help of their own categories, resist domination and theorize about it.” See “Shamans, Savages and the Wilderness: On the Audibility of Dissent and the Future of Civilizations in Ashis Nandy, *Bonfire of Creeds*, (2004): 475.


acceptable, consistent with the psychoanalytic mode as revolt, is in rejecting to “thrive on what psychoanalysis references as secondary gains for the victim from the oppressive system.”\(^{51}\) It is only through the rupturing and regeneration of self that recovery and liberation can be claimed.

In keeping with this commitment to psychic rebirth Nandy states that one must side with the slave, not in recognition of enslavement or transcendent suffering but because this subject position represents a higher order cognition. The non-player, the subject in revolt whose intentions are to displace the secondary gains that are reproduced in anti-colonial liberation movements has something to learn from the slave. Nandy’s account describes this in the following way: “one must choose the slave also because he represents a higher order cognition which perforce includes the master as a human, whereas the master’s cognition has to exclude the slave as a thing.”\(^{52}\) The psychic life of the slave is privileged because of the ways in which self and other relations are ruptured and regenerated.

### 8.1.5 Rupturing and Regenerating Selfhood: Gandhi as a figure in revolt

This theme of regenerating subjectivity and in recognising the humanity of the other is explored further in the second essay of the text, “The Uncolonised Mind: A Post-Colonial View of India and the West.” Nandy does this by offering two contrasting psycho-biographical accounts of the psychic lives of Rudyard Kipling and Sri Aurobindo. The primary difference between these figures is for Nandy evidenced in the ways that their identity and selfhood is represented and affirmed. Consistent with the argument developed in Nandy’s analysis of colonialism Aurobindo’s case provides a more interesting response to colonialism. For Nandy, Aurobindo similar to Gandhi provided responses to colonialism that demonstrated a greater respect for the selfhood of the other.\(^{53}\) The essay also reintroduces us to the figure of Gandhi, previously explored in Nandy’s work as the bad subject, and now as perhaps the ultimate figure in revolt.\(^{54}\) What takes place in the text and through these readings then is a hybridisation

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\(^{53}\) For Nandy, Aurobindo’s case provides a more interesting response to colonialism in that it was a “cultural self-affirmation which had a greater respect for the selfhood of the other.” Ashis Nandy, *Ibid.*, 85.

\(^{54}\) I have already detailed Nandy’s reading of Gandhi as the bad subject in his critique of secularism. This is discussed in Chapter 2, *An Anti-Secular Manifesto: The Cultural and Psychological Viability of*
of experience, as definitions of loss of self are articulated as highly subjective instances within the complexities of psychic life. In Gandhi’s case this response is all the more arresting given that his subjectivity is a product of Colonial India. Consistent with Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode, “it was colonial India, still preserving something of its androgyous cosmology and style, which ultimately produced a transcultural protest against the hyper-masculine world view of colonialism, in the form of Gandhi.”

Gandhi actuates the ethical recovery of the non-player Nandy has in mind. Gandhi is also in revolt, and as Nandy suggests, a product of a culture in revolt. What Gandhi recognised is that the re-claiming of self and Indianness was central to the recovery or liberation from colonialism. Moreover, he did so without being co-opted as many pre-Gandhian protest movements had already demonstrated by reclaiming a sense of self defined by masculinity, aggression and violence. Gandhi demonstrates that liberation or recovery of self, consistent with the operation of a psychoanalytic mode, is made possible through our individual and collective capacity to question, think and represent. The liberation or recovery that is advocated is therefore connected to restoring our humanity and the wellbeing in psychic life. This humanity is also inclusive of the humanity of the other. For Gandhi, as a figure in revolt, there is a distinct rejection of the use of violence in regenerating the relationships between self and other. As Nandy affirms violence “ties the victim more deeply to the culture of oppression than any collaboration can.”

To condone “the major technique of oppression in our times, organized violence,” Nandy maintains, “Cannot but further socialize the victims to the basic values of his oppressor.” Gandhi’s account of liberation as non-player best captures this need to reclaim our humanity. This is demonstrated in the way in which Gandhi displaced and regenerated two premises of colonial ideology in British India. These premises were based on sex (the hyper-masculinity of the coloniser against the effeminate Hindu for instance) and age (for example the half-child, half-savage Indian Other). The second part of this discussion in the text turns to the ways these meanings...

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Secularism. In this chapter Gandhi’s failure to reinstate the secular norm and ideal situates him as the bad subject or as a figure in revolt; a position that Nandy distinguishes as important in his critique. 55 “The most creative response to the perversion of Western culture however came as it must, from its victims.” Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, (1983): 48. 56 “If for the West the present was a special case of an unfolding history, for Gandhi as a representative of traditional India history was a special case of an all-embracing permanent present, waiting to be interpreted and reinterpreted.” Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 57. 57 Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997): 34. 58 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 34.
confronted their traditional Indian counterparts and their new incarnations in Gandhi. Gandhi, as a figure in revolt, thus ruptures and traverses the paternal masculine social code of colonial ideology.

The concept of non-violence advocated by Gandhi is central to understanding the rupturing of the masculine social code and the recovery of self offered. Consistent with the operation of the psychoanalytic mode of revolt, Gandhi’s concept of non-violence is intimately connected to subjectivity. The liberation and recovery that non-violence provides is not only an external reference point for political mobilisation. This recovery is also predicated on an internal revolt, a rupturing and regeneration of self. In Nandy’s account Gandhi challenges the ideology of biological stratification acting as a homologue of – and legitimacy for – political inequality and injustice. Gandhi as a figure in revolt does this by rupturing and regenerating meaning in two ways. Firstly, that for Gandhi androgyny was equated with saintliness, thus privileging this above the categories of masculinity (especially hyper-masculinity) and femininity. Secondly, that in rupturing the masculine social code in this way, Gandhi regenerates femininity as superior to masculinity, because of its connection to transcendental life. 59 For Nandy, the effect of Gandhi’s rupturing and regeneration of the masculine social code is that it also reconfigures our understanding of porous boundaries of self, and ego strength. What may look like yet another case of a “‘weak ego’ in the Indian can be viewed as another kind of ego strength.”60 Nandy argues that what is perceived as the weak ego of the Indian and Indian culture cannot be equated with an impoverishment of the ego, or a loss of self. Within this re-articulation of self, hyper-masculinity and aggressiveness are removed from the equation. For Nandy, Gandhi’s account of “non-violence gives men access to protective maternity and by implication, to the godlike state of arghanarisvara, a god half-man, half-woman.”61 Gandhi’s concept of non-violence is therefore, privileged as part of a broader account of selfhood. According to Nandy Eric Erikson rightly extends upon this by nothing that Gandhi’s recovery of self, “imputes an

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59 For a more detailed analysis of this refer to Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, (1983): 52-54.
60 In his essay “Towards a Third World Utopia” Nandy develops his argument further in establishing that “What looks like poor independence training in the non-achieving societies and ‘willing subservience’ and ‘self-castration’ in the Hindu may be read also as an affirmation of basic relatedness and a recognition of the need for some degree of reverence in human relations.” Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias, (1997): 51.
irreducible minimum humanity [as new possible thought and meaning] to the oppressors and militantly promotes the belief that this humanity could be actualised."  

For Gandhi the orientation towards myth in order to articulate the re-ordering of consciousness was part of a more general orientation to an alternate public consciousness grounded within a different account of the present. In Nandy’s reading, “from such a viewpoint, the past can be an authority but the nature of the authority is seen as shifting, amorphous and amenable to intervention.” Subject to the rhythms of rupture and regeneration liberation and recovery within the text can only be claimed if these processes of retrospective return, and retrospective questioning take place.

As The Intimate Enemy affirms the only recovery that is accepted in the text comes through these processes of psychoanalytic revolt. The following passage affirms his commitment to these processes as a mode of critical engagement. Nandy articulates this recovery when he states that; “one can either call it an Oriental version of the concept of permanent revolution or a practical extension of the mystical concept of timeless time in some Asiatic traditions.” This commitment to the timelessness of the analytic re-affirms the intellectual and ethical commitment to the therapeutic register. The therapeutic reveals itself in rupturing and regenerating the masculinity of colonialism and in turn, rupturing and regenerating emasculated forms of dissent and practices of psychological resistance that a figure like Gandhi actuates in Nandy’s analysis. Gandhi’s mode of dissent is celebrated by Nandy here as an example of critical analytic intervention. These critical analytic perspectives succeed in rupturing and regenerating subjectivity and in doing so, regenerate our understanding of both loss and recovery of self for the coloniser and colonised.

8.2 Rupturing and Regenerating the Indian Political Imaginary: The Permanent Play with National Fantasies

The consistency and integrity of Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode as revolt, and through this his capacity to generate critical analytic perspectives is evident in a more recent example. I consider five articles written by Nandy where this psychoanalytic

63 “Public consciousness was not seen as a causal product of history but as related to history non-causally through memories and anti-memories.” Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, (1983): 57.
64 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 57.
65 Ashis Nandy, Ibid., 62.
mode is applied to contest dominant meanings about the Indian nation state, national integration and Indianness. Nandy ruptures and regenerates official accounts and in doing so plays with a series of national fantasies that underpin the Indian nation state. The five articles published in *The Times of India*, are taken from a selection of Nandy’s articles published during 2005-2007. Although these articles are short in length, the permanent features of this psychoanalytic mode operating Nandy’s work are evident. The mode of critical engagement maintains its integrity even in addressing sensitive national issues. At this point of forced engagement Nandy addresses both the complexity of these issues and the ways in which these complexities have been standardised, homogenised and foreclosed within public debates. What each article emphasises are the ways that complex issues have been foreclosed by a dominant account at the expense of alternative possibilities and imaginings. Vinay Lal comments on this tension between rupturing a dominant national imaginary, and regenerating and re-articulating alternatives. Lal explains that, “Nandy finds himself an inveterate critic of the Indian nation-state, which has little tolerance for dissent and for competing notions of loyalty, but contra wise he is a great admirer of Indian Civilization, which has largely been a pluralistic enterprise.”

The critical analytic perspectives demonstrated in these articles illustrate the psychoanalytic mode as revolt as a permanent feature of Nandy’s work and identity. It is in this constant rupturing and regeneration that a dominant Indian political imaginary and its accompanying national fantasies can be worked through and recreated.

### 8.2.1 Empty Carnival

Writing in March 2007 Nandy’s article “Empty Carnival” explores the way in which cricket in India is a sporting game, but equally symbolises passionate national attachments. The game of cricket in India becomes a site or playing field for identification with nation. Consequently a number of fantasies regarding nation, national identity and national integration are projected onto the game and perpetuated through it. In Nandy’s reading cricket becomes interwoven with issues concerning

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67 Ashis Nandy, “Empty Carnival” *The Times of India*, (24 March 2007). Quotes which are cited from these articles in the main body of the text are not footnoted individually given the short length of the articles that do not exceed more than one page in length each. Rather each quote cited is referenced within the sub-headings listed, the headings of these newspaper articles.
unification and solidarity. Reading cricket in this way enables Nandy to establish that the game is an open ended projective game for these fantasies, anxieties, fears and threats regarding the Indian nation. The game, however re-establishes the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in terms of those who support the Indian cricket team, and in effect India, and those who do not. The cricket playing field then becomes a field of signification where the hyper-competitiveness of the game is intimately tied to over-determined expressions of nationalism. The title “Empty Carnival” gestures towards Nandy’s concern that the dynamism of the game is being increasingly foreclosed by these over-determined nationalistic responses. As he explains “the stage has been set for heartburn and narcissistic wounds.” What is problematic are that these “nationalist aspirations…have begun to find pathological expression in cricket in recent years.” The nationalism embodied in Indian cricket as a national symbol justifies an aggression, which is already present in the game but does so now bearing the scars of these “narcissistic wounds.” In understanding cricket as a projective test, then these aspirations of national unity in victory become dangerous and destructive defences.

Consistent with the rules of the game, a national dominance and unity can only ever be claimed by the winning cricket team. Losing a cricket game therefore, carries the intensity of these narcissistic wounds. The experience of losing a game is experienced as a loss in national unity. It is also experienced as a loss of identity in terms of the integrative function that national identification provides. The over-determined feature of this affective response is evident for Nandy when in loosing a game “cricketers and cricket administrators are [cast as] under-patriotic, corrupt, greedy or self-centred.” Losing a game is aligned with not fiercely defending nation and the national interest.

In the article Nandy ruptures and displaces the chain of association operating in these established meanings and representations of cricket. He re-claims the game and notions of gamesmanship as a more open-ended enterprise that resists homogenisation and closure of meaning. In Nandy’s analysis cricket as the national game is displaced from the nation’s gains and losses and re-generated and re-articulated as a “subversive

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68 Elsewhere Nandy has developed this argument further by arguing that, “Nationalism justifies the aggression which is expressed through the game and the Indian’s who feel India is being unjustly ranked low in the international pecking order, to whom nationalism itself enjoys some intrinsic legitimacy on that ground, are the first to politicise cricket and to see the game as an area where a nation’s fate and status could be determined.” Ashis Nandy, *The Tao of Cricket: On Games of Destiny and the Destiny of Games*, (New Delhi, Viking and Penguin, 1989): 104.
game that rebels against the productivity principle.” In contrast to nationalism the game of cricket thrives on its “built-in-uncertainties.” It is in questioning and working through associations, projections, introjections, meanings and representations that the element of “chance” central to game can be reclaimed. The defences that truncate this concept of chance must be worked through for Nandy, including the uncertainties and insecurities that underpin these nationalistic sentiments. The retrospective questioning and working through of these complex individual and collective defences therefore opens up our understanding of cricket in terms of chance. The game of cricket is typically “Indian” for Nandy because it recognises “fate” as luck or chance. Like the porous boundaries of Indianness where the interplay between the rational and non-rational in human affairs is more diffuse, open to chance, so too is the meaning of the game regenerated in these terms. Regenerating cricket in this way therefore allows for a more complex psychic association to be established in which the boundaries between security and insecurity, unity and loss become more diffuse. According to Nandy the game then becomes an open-ended projective test that resists the pathologies of nationalism.

Nandy laments the increasing secularisation and professionalisation of the game of cricket. Implicit in these processes are the ways that its players are expected to conform to an existing dominant and standardised image of the cricket player as national hero. This standardised image forecloses the possibilities that the article wants to reclaim on a number of levels. Moreover, it denotes the ways that a player’s own subjectivity is foreclosed by these processes. For Nandy, rupturing and regenerating this closure of subjectivity and meanings is vital to the wellbeing of individual and collective psychic life. He notes, “that some cricketers still remain under-professionalised, risk taking, adventurous and happy-go-lucky is a mark of defiance and a tribute to the resilience of human nature.” It is this possibility for defiance or revolt as an expression of the resilience within accounts of selfhood that the article celebrates. It is in the continuing re-creation of self that the relationship between cricket and nation also remains dynamic. For Nandy the psychological health of the nation, including the health of concepts of national victory, in cricket or otherwise, must retain this dynamic and open-ended feature. When this capacity for rupturing and regenerating meaning and subjectivity is foreclosed, the element of “chance” in the game becomes over-determined by the pathologies of nationalism. Consequently, what is a dynamic game of chance becomes an empty carnival.
8.2.2 Imaginary Cities

In this article titled “Imaginary Cities” and published in 2006 Nandy explores the ways in which the naming of national cities is fundamental to the boundaries of the Indian nation state. Nandy contrasts the official naming of cities by the nation state with more local definitions and points of reference. The claim advanced in the article is not over which name is true, but that this official naming process forecloses the field of possible names. Expressed in psychoanalytic terms this official process of signification forecloses the field of the Imaginary. It is for Nandy these official names instituted by the nation states, that dominate the Indian political Imaginary. Thus, what is foreclosed by these processes, are other possible imaginary cities. More importantly, the official naming process forecloses our capacity to identify with these cities in alternative and often, conflicting ways. In Nandy’s analysis the naming of cities is connected to questions of subjectivity and identity. The recognition of multiple, co-existing and often conflicting names of cities are thus important for understanding processes of identification and expressions of individual and collective selfhood.

The operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt enables Nandy to acknowledge the homogenising and standardising effects of this official naming process. Nandy ruptures the closure of the field of identifications in order to regenerate disavowed names of cities. Moreover, this regeneration of imaginary cities takes place alongside a recovery of the pluralism within Indian cultures, languages and traditions. The article displaces the official and dominant names of cities by arguing, “local or vernacular names of cities must have official status.” For example, to acknowledge that the Kannadigas call Bangalore Beengalooru is to acknowledge the different vernaculars that exist within Indian culture. National culture, with its emphasis on an official national language and the naming process instituted by the state abjects these alternative accounts from view. For Nandy, to recognise the subjectivity of the Kannadigas, along with their points of reference in the signifier Beengalooru is to extend to the cultural self, democratic rights. The pluralism in these points of reference is therefore connected to democratic pluralism. Within Indian democracy even this cultural self, must be afforded recognition of their rights for self-articulation and signification.

69 Ashis Nandy, “Imaginary Cities” The Times of India, (7 November 2006).
It is not, however, the Indian State’s official name that Nandy seeks to rupture but its “claim to exclusivity,” as the dominant name through which identification and signification is expressed. Nandy’s invitation to the reader is to challenge and question these claims to exclusivity. The invitation, consistent with his mode of critical intervention is to rupture and regenerate the meanings attached to this exclusive dominant national self. To what extent does this official national self truncate our individual and collective capacity to critically think, question and represent alternatives in these processes of naming? The issue of naming, and in drawing on alternatives within these processes of naming is for Nandy connected to the wellbeing of psychic life in individuals and in societies. As he claims, “a great metropolis almost always has more than one name and its wears this plurality as a badge of its greatness.” The concept of pluralism, including democratic pluralism, becomes a corrective against the dangers of homogenisation and standardisation. He affirms that it “corrects and compensates for the sanitized, de-vernacularised images which can dominate a national imaginary.” Nandy therefore, directly addresses the need for regeneration and infinite recreation for the collective wellbeing of a society. He states, “For a great city always hides a number of cities of the mind, associated with different communities, cultures and languages. These imaginary cities are backed by distinctive experiences and different configurations of public memory.”

According to Nandy we need to recognise the internal and external function the imaginary cities perform in public memory and in keeping the psychic life of the nation dynamic. To ignore these imaginary cities is a disavowal of a vernacular culture that continues to exist alongside official imaginings. Moreover, to ignore these imaginary cities and the possibility of their existence is to ignore our own individual and collective capacities for rupture, regeneration and recreation of meaning.

8.2.3 Birth Pangs

In “Birth Pangs” published in 2006 Nandy applies his critical psychoanalytic methods to work through the complexities of the Partition of India and the establishment of the Independent Indian Nation State. For Nandy the entry point into these processes of anamnesis and retrospective questioning is through the memories of

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Partition. He turns to the memories of trauma and the experiences of genocide that characterised this period. Nandy revisits these memories not to affirm and celebrate the birth of nation, but rather, to rupture the dominant meanings attached to this birth and which circulated within official accounts of the establishment of the Indian nation state. In doing so, he also radically questions the ways that Partition is remembered. For Nandy the regenerated meanings attached to the birth of nation must include a sense of loss that accompanied Partition. This loss is definable in two ways. Firstly, by the loss of human life, the genocide, violence and displacement of peoples that took place, and secondly, that there is a loss of more plural and diverse understanding of Indianness. Further, this sense of loss in both its manifestations needs to be publicly acknowledged within narratives of individual and collective trauma. Loss needs to be publicly acknowledged in order to work through the ways in which this birth is remembered, spoken about and represented. Whilst August 14, 1946 marks the birth of the independent countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Nandy’s analysis calls for recognition of the divisiveness, violence and trauma underpinning these experiences.

The article invites us to remember and revisit the memories and trauma of Partition outside of the official narratives of birth of nation. This however, is not an easy invitation to accept. For Nandy this is all the more reason why this process of rupturing and regenerating memories is imperative. As he asserts, “to disown its significance is to disclaim a part of our collective self.” To disown the significance of Partition is to perpetuate a dangerous process of collective forgetting. What is problematic about this collective forgetting is that it maintains existing structures of remembering, including established defences, projections and introjections. This preserves existing structures and patterns of thought within psychic life that can then feed into a number of hostilities. Simply stated, in not working through these associations and defences the scars of trauma, forgetting and the silencing of memories becomes the breeding ground “to refresh paranoia and self-destructive fantasies of revenge.” This aggressive drive towards the other (the non-Indian, namely Pakistani) is perpetuated through a politics of forgetting. Moreover, in Nandy’s analysis this aggressive drive that marks relations to the other, occurs alongside the partitioning of self. The possibility of revisiting and working through this trauma is overshadowed by defensive structures of revenge. This modality of revenge notably characterises India Pakistan relations. Nandy laments the ways in which the regression into this mode of projections and introjections takes over
within a paranoid national imaginary. Once this takes effect then this culture of forgetting acquires a political value that is intimately connected to the national interest and national security. This culture of forgetting thus forecloses these processes of anamnesis and more broadly, revolt from taking place.

In redressing this, Nandy’s analysis therefore seeks to rupture and regenerate narratives of trauma in more complex terms. Re-visiting these memories of trauma and entering into processes of remembering through anamnesis is a difficult process. These processes are nonetheless essential in order to rupture the defensive structures outlined. The article displaces these national fantasies of forgetting its birth pangs, which work to safeguard national interests by turning to the memories of individual victims. For Nandy, the day of remembrance of Partition becomes a day to rupture and regenerate its significance and the meanings attached to it. It becomes as he states, an opportunity, “to mourn the victims in a different way.” These alternative expressions of mourning also displace established meanings attached to these individual experiences. For Nandy this rupturing and regeneration of meaning enables us to publicly acknowledge that the victims “were not the foot soldiers of a freer-postcolonial world but the cannon fodders for an ideology of state that saw conventional nation-states as the last word in human emancipation.”

Nandy’s remembering of victims of this way is therefore radically confronting for it displaces established meanings and official accounts of remembrance. He thus confronts and questions whom these victims are and what it is that they should be remembered for. Nandy’s critical analytic perspective encourages its readers to reflect, confront and work through the politics of silencing and the politics of remembrance. Once these processes have been entered into then the meanings associated with the remembrance day of partition can be ruptured and regenerated. In Nandy’s analysis remembering and commemorating the birth of nation must be accompanied with recognition of the complexities of loss that equally define the birth of the independent Indian nation state.
8.2.4 Imagined Homeland: South Asia as Civilisation as Against Nation State⁷¹

In “Imagined Homeland” published in 2005 Nandy questions the role of the nation state within South Asia. He argues that the presence of the nation-state in a region like South Asia has imposed a series of facile differences or inclusions and exclusions that are instituted through the imagined boundaries of the nation-state. Consequently, this logic of difference and differentiation underpins definitions of the nation state. Nandy argues “most states define themselves not by what they are, but what they are not.” It is through a series of negations and abjections, of what one is not that the boundaries of national identity can be secured. In the article Nandy radically questions the processes of identification operating through the nation state and which now define the region. This logic acquires a political significance for Nandy through the voices of politicians heralding that, “India is not Pakistan.” Such claims work to consolidate and further strengthen these processes of national identification, whilst simultaneously exploiting complex and longstanding insecurities and defences.⁷² These processes of identification are complicated further by the fact that South Asia, particularly prior to the Partition of India was marked by a very different cultural, political, and psychological structure. For Nandy the pluralism and diversity of the South Asian civilisations were foreclosed by the advent of the nation states and its set of exclusive identity claims. As Nandy explains the “region looks like a clutch of rather reluctant states, most of which fear that positive self-definition will not take them very far.” The boundaries of the nation state however, in Nandy’s analysis remain “partly artificial.” The role of historians and legal scholars has been to counter this reluctance and artificiality by emphasising the loss of ontological security that the absence of the nation state would lead us towards.

Nandy challenges the dominant view that South Asia emerged as a confederation of nation states in the 1970s. Furthermore he challenges the view that by the 1980s South Asia was deeply ingrained in the political psyche of the region. In contrast to these official and dominant views, South Asian civilisations have a longer and more complex history. Nandy invites us to confront what he terms are the “hard-boiled” affirmations of nation states. He does this by inviting us to question these affirmations and the dominant role that nation states play in the regions collective imaginary. The nation states of the region he argues are modelled on pre- World War I European states.

⁷² The historical complexity of these insecurities and defences were explored to some extent in the previous article titled “Birth Pangs.”
The emergence of these postcolonial nation states in South Asia coincides with claims for self-determination and recognition on the international stage. This self-determination however, needed to be expressed in a recognizable language, the language of the nation state. The ideal of “South Asia” emerges from these processes of national consolidation and as a response to other regional groupings on the international stage, such as South East Asia. In Nandy’s account these well established dominant associations and meanings, particularly within the field of international and diplomatic politics are not as secure as they might appear on the surface. Nandy’s analysis questions and ruptures the perceived security of the boundaries of the nation state in South Asia, by suggesting these are far more precarious arrangements at play. He suggests that the everyday lives and moral frames of ordinary citizens threaten the official meanings of South Asia. In Nandy’s reading the term South Asia “remains” he tells us “a compromise.” What is problematic about this compromise is that, “it has allowed the Indian state to hijack the right to the Indic civilization, forcing other states in the region to seek new bases for their political cultures and disown crucial aspects of their cultural selves.”

It is in articulating and re-claiming these disavowed aspects of this “other India and its inhabitants” that carries forward the “subversive potentialities” to regenerate meaning. It is through processes of retrospective return and in turning to question this other India that regeneration of meanings can take place. This is an alternative and regenerated concept of South Asia that is defined by the non-official and dissenting views of ordinary everyday other Indians. This concept of South Asia therefore transcends the boundaries of the nation state and notions of a national self. This takes place because in affirming a collective cultural self, who transcends the nation state, “the exchange of low-brow cultural artefacts” is made possible. According to Nandy when “high cultures cannot cross national boundaries, low cultures do.” The article ends with examples of a regenerated image of South Asia defined less by nation states and more by a shared cultural imaginary. This regeneration is attributed to these lowbrow cultural artefacts or mediums that challenge processes of identification. Nandy turns to the examples of Bombay cinema and TV soap opera serials as instituting an alternative imaginary of South Asia. These images and narratives communicated through these mediums challenge an existing dominant imagining of South Asia as a confederation of states, thus transcending facile differences between nation states. These mediums draw
upon narratives, images and symbols that a collective cultural self of the region can identify with. These mediums operate on what he terms “the basis of cross-national trust, a poor man’s version of post-nationalist awareness.” This post-national awareness, along with its regenerated modes of psychic organisation, is reason enough Nandy claims “for the security community in South Asia to be nervous.” Therefore, these low brow cultural artefacts work to challenge official narratives of the nation-state that dominate the meaning of South Asia. In Nandy’s account South Asia as a concept takes on a broader imagining, and in doing so, challenges the dominant status that is afforded the nation state and its fantasies of omnipotence in the region.

8.2.5 There’s No Forgetting The Trauma

In the article published in 2005 “There’s No Forgetting the Trauma” directly addresses the need for individual and collective trauma to be worked through so that a politics of silencing is ruptured. The entry point for this task of anamnesis and retrospective questioning are the collective memories and experiences of the Indian Emergency. Nandy revisits the memories and experiences of the Indian Emergency to emphasise the importance of remembering these political conditions. Moreover, the article can be read as a cautionary reminder of the need for critical analytic perspectives, or even more specifically the need for a culture of revolt. The article is written after the thirteenth anniversary of the Emergency and Nandy questions what impact these events have had on a contemporary Indian political imaginary. The Indian Emergency refers to a period from the June 1975 until March 1977 when the Indira Gandhi Government suspended civil rights in India. Nandy emphasises that a whole generation of Indian have succeeded these events. This generation are either unfamiliar with these political conditions, or simply gesture towards a collective national memory of these events. Nandy asks, what is repressed from this collective national memory? In other words, what are the politics of remembering that underpin contemporary national fantasies of the Emergency? Furthermore, is there a culture of memory of these events, which safeguards us from these events from taking place again? For Nandy, the response to these questions is evident in the authoritarian political culture that continues to linger today. Consistent with the operation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt Nandy warns us against the radical evils of this authoritarian culture. It is a culture that is defined by

73 Ashis Nandy, “There’s No Forgetting The Trauma,” The Times of India, (9 July 2005).
the suspension of thought and representation. The suspension of civil rights in India during the Emergency was also a suspension of democratic questioning, expression and ultimately the suspension of democratic civil rights. The authoritarianism of the then Gandhi Government led to the suspension of quite literally thought itself, and an inability to publicly express dissenting views.

In remembering the Emergency in these ways Nandy invites the reader into these processes of rupturing and regenerating the meanings and significance attached to these authoritarian political conditions. Nandy’s rupturing of the silences and the forgetting provokes us to question whether these political conditions continue and are present in India today. He confronts the national fantasy that the Emergency is an isolated event in India’s political history by noting a number of complicities between the past and the present. Nandy identifies the continuities between the authoritarian political culture then and now. He asserts that, “our law and order machinery remains as compromised as ever and our politicians and bureaucrats have learnt to negotiate the few institutional changes that were introduced after the Emergency was lifted.”

He then turns to radically question the ways in which the events of the Emergency are remembered. There is a correlation established between publicly recognising the seeds of authoritarianism within political culture today, and the ways in which these experiences are individually and collectively remembered. However, the question of collective memory is not straightforward. As Nandy highlights there is a fear associated with these processes of remembering. There is a deep collective resistance of not wanting to know, about that, which remains located defensively in the past. Such attitudes must be worked through in order to ensure that the conditions of authoritarianism can be recognised in their contemporary manifestations. There are nonetheless, deep and complex resistances in collectively remembering the Emergency. This is evident for Nandy in the fact that “no Indian historian, sociologist or political scientist has produced a comprehensive, serious, political or social history of the Emergency.” While this in part explains the repetition of a culture of forgetting within public life, Nandy questions whether these traumas of the Emergency can be repressed from individual memory.

Nandy disrupts the belief that the memories of the Emergency are repressed or forgotten memories. He questions whether trauma and public tragedy can be forgotten when people have been direct victims. These memories continue to survive in
psychoanalytic terms as “recessive or latent layers of our selves and the underside of our public life, outside the reach of formal or official commemorations?” This psychoanalytic questioning into the underside features of self and public life functions as an invitation to enter into these analytic processes of revolt. Nandy’s question also raises the concern that “official commemorations” have foreclosed our individual and collective capacities to remember differently. The article regenerates the occlusion of these memories from the national imaginary by situating these as alive and present within the underside of political culture. These non-memories, that is memories existing outside of official accounts, must therefore be valued, in order to these processes of inclusion and exclusion at play. According to Nandy these official accounts allow for a very limited possibility of remembering. To continue to trivialise these memories may be a strategy of collective psychological survival but is also another way of resisting working through these memories and experiences. It is yet another defence against the challenges of retrospective return and processes of anamnesis that needs to take place in order to actuate these alternative possibilities, for remembering differently. For Nandy this alternative remembering affects the ways that we understand the past and the present. Our relationship to the past affects our ability to address present dangers, including the return of this suspension of questioning and thought. This critical analytic approach reminds the reader, that even against these deep and complex internal resistances, memories and anti-memories “do inform the political choices of our electorate.” The message of the article is that there is a distinctive value in sensitising us to the ever-present dangers of the suspension of thought. This is especially important when the conditions of suspension in the form of authoritarianism or otherwise, cease to be recognised as the suspension of thought in contemporary political life. To this extent the message of the article is that the past has ways of informing the present and revealing itself in the future.

8.3 Repetition as a Constant Questioning: The Permanence of the Psychoanalytic Mode as Revolt

I have detailed the ways that the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operates in Nandy’s work by analysing two different examples. The first example detailed the ways in which Nandy’s mode of critical intervention operates in The Intimate Enemy, written in 1983. The text is widely recognised for the originality of Nandy’s interventions in
rethinking the experiences of colonialism. In my reading this originality is explained in terms of his critical analytic perspective and what I claim are the enduring qualities of this mode critique over time. It is this psychoanalytic mode that enables Nandy to generate critique that ruptures and regenerates subjectivity, including relations between coloniser and colonised, self and other, victim and perpetrator. The emphasis on the psychology of colonialism enables him to confront, work through and recreate the dominant and official meanings attached to concepts of psychological resistance and cultural survival. In doing so Nandy radically challenges our understanding of the experiences and representations of internalising an enemy, that is, as he states, intimate. The questioning of the psychology of colonialism and these processes of internalisation extends to both the coloniser and colonised within British and Indian societies. Nandy ruptures the meanings and associations of these internalised experiences in order to regenerate the loss and recovery of self. He does this by challenging the ways in which subjectivity is configured in the ideology of secularism and in exploring the possibility of recovery. Consistent with the features of Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode as revolt he offers the reader a number of alternative accounts, meanings, and experiences of colonisation. These are evident in the ways in which figures like Gandhi as a figure in revolt, ruptured and regenerated the masculine colonial code. Gandhi actuates the psychoanalytic processes that Nandy advocates in the text. In which concepts of recovery are greatly challenged and reconstituted within a framework of non-violence.

The second example discussed was a selection of short newspaper articles that demonstrate Nandy’s contributions to public debates during 2005-2007. Written more than twenty years after The Intimate Enemy these articles exemplify the repetition and moreover the permanent and enduring features of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt over time. The articles address a range of issues about the Indian nation, national integration and national identity. Nandy, I suggested plays with national fantasies in order to confront and challenges these. In working through a number of dominant held beliefs and assumptions about the nation state he extends the invitation to the reader to enter into these critical analytic perspectives. The psychoanalytic mode as revolt reveals an uncompromising quality for rupture and regeneration in challenging official accounts, dominant beliefs, meanings, identities, fantasies and projections. Even within the scope of these brief articles, these processes of revolt redirect signification, as Nandy’s perspective ultimately advocates a transformation of not only meaning but also
social relations. If we accept the intention of this mode of critical intervention then the invitation to the reader is to enter into this logic that promotes receptivity, reflexivity, alternative imaginings and open futures. These futures are accessible through the creative play with subjectivities, in which new or rather, alternative psychic and socio-symbolic identifications are made possible.

The repetition and constant questioning of this psychoanalytic mode, its incessant movement, are in Kristeva’s work described as the conditions of permanent revolt. This permanent revolt is fundamental to cultivating a culture of revolt. Kristeva warns that this culture is necessary for “rather than falling asleep in the new normalizing order, let us try to rekindle the flame (easily extinguishable) of the culture of revolt.”74 This call to revolt and enter into these processes of revolt is equally present in Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode of critical engagement. Through his work, Nandy similarly warns us against the evils of a normalising order, and the homogenisation and stagnation that accompany dominant official meanings and representations. Through his work Nandy invites us into the dynamic and permanent features of this mode of incessant movement. The repetition and the permanence of this repetition, therefore takes place as a constant questioning and encourages reflexivity. This mode of critique is therapeutic and articulated within a therapeutic register because it facilitates rupture and re-articulation within psychic life to continue as a dynamic and timeless process. In each of these examples the repetition of Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode as revolt demonstrates these possibilities for psychic re-birth. This psychic re-birth extends beyond individual experience and in Nandy’s work promotes the transformation of social relations. As Kristeva reminds us regenerating subjectivity also implies a “rebirth of meaning for the other, which can only be understood in view of the experience of revolt.”75 This is demonstrated I have argued in Nandy’s willingness to enter into psychoanalytic processes to generate critical analytic perspectives that resist the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology and prevent a normalising logic or order from taking over. The effect of this in Nandy’s work is that this mode promotes a dynamic permanent questioning. In his work it also simultaneously advances reflexive and sensitising processes or approaches to critique.

75 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 8.
These reflexive and sensitising approaches are equally present in Nandy’s identity as critic. For in each of these examples this permanent rupturing and regeneration of the psychoanalytic mode in his work, re-directs “the aggressivity of the drive from abjection of the self to the transformation of social relations.”76 The psychoanalytic process of re-making subjectivity and meanings extends to Nandy and the meanings attached to his subjectivity and identity as critic. The permanent and incessant movement of this process situates Nandy firmly inside the critical analytic approaches he advocates. Simply stated, in actuating these critical analytic perspectives Nandy enters into these processes of revolt through his work. These perspectives re-direct the meanings attached to Nandy’s identity. For in and through this mode of critical analytic engagement he resists abjection by being re-made as the critical analytic intellectual. Nandy resists abjection because via this mode of critical analytic engagement he ruptures and re-creates signification, including the signification of his identity as critic.

The permanent and enduring features of this mode institute a dynamic space through which to recreate meaning and signification. Nandy, like Kristeva, endorses the need for a culture of revolt. He warns that conformity and standardisation, as symptoms of modernity, only serves to perpetuate the illusion of one world for all. These processes of homogenisation and standardisation must be resisted and revolted against. Nandy vigorously affirms the importance of these psychoanalytic processes, in his defence of the analysis within a number of places in his work. Writing in 2002 Nandy re-affirms the need for social and political analysis to confront and resist the fixity and closure of meaning, particularly in light of the dangers of an increasingly dominant global culture of knowledge. This global culture of knowledge is also expressed as a culture of commonsense, thus referencing its standardising features. For Nandy, once knowledge is instituted and accepted in normative terms as a culture of commonsense then these processes of psychoanalytic revolt must be activated. The commitment to these processes of revolt, along with the autonomy of thought which they generate for Nandy is evident in the following comments. He states, “As the intellectually accessible universe expands, and as we confront disowned cultures and states of consciousness about the presently dominant global middle-class culture of knowledge knows nothing, we need more than ever our capacity to recognise the alternative realities that we are

daily coerced to bury.”77 What Nandy identifies as our individual and collective capacity to recognise alternative realities are the effects of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating in his work. The intellectual commitment to these psychoanalytic processes of revolt affirms Nandy’s commitment to the timelessness and dynamism of psychic life. Nandy thus becomes an intellectual who, through this mode, consistently demonstrates a sensitivity and capacity to generate critical analytic perspectives that invite us to question our own subjectivity, as much as they do his own identity as critic of the state. It is the permanent and enduring features of this psychoanalytic mode that ensures that Nandy in and through his work resists abjection.

Chapter 9: Conclusion
Re-imaginings in the Cultural Politics of Selfhood

This dissertation has explored the ideas and methods in the work of the Indian political psychologist Ashis Nandy. In exploring this relationship between ideas and method this dissertation established two key arguments, central to understanding Nandy’s work and identity as critic of the state. Firstly, that the ideas advanced in his critique of secularism, and his work more broadly, need to be understood through his psychoanalytic approach to social and political criticism. I suggested that this approach is already present in his voice as political psychologist, with a psychoanalytic orientation. Nandy’s approach turns to the complexities of subjectivity, to external and internal processes, to the border between culture and psyche, in order to address social and political concerns. This capacity and aptitude is though not always recognisable and moreover, remains under theorised as a feature of his social and political criticism. The second argument established in the dissertation is that this appropriation of psychoanalysis manifests through a psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating within Nandy’s work: one that enables him to generate critical analytic perspectives that resist distortion by the effects of the dominant political ideology. Therefore, this dissertation affirms the proposition that the methods through which social and political criticism is generated are just as important as the ideas expressed. This has been reflected in the journey travelled in this dissertation from phobic object to psychoanalytic mode, or from the symptomatic to the psychotherapeutic in order to theorise and characterise the psychoanalytic mode as revolt central to Nandy’s work and his identity as critic.

In order to reveal Nandy’s approach and its significance, and to further characterise this as a psychoanalytic mode I engaged with psychoanalytic concepts and methods. I turned to Judith Butler’s account of the formation of subjectivity in The Psychic Life of Power (1997) to explore the way the psychic life of power and of ideology operate through processes of subjection, in the making of subjectivities. I argued that Butler’s conceptual framework is useful for understanding the argument Nandy makes about subjectivity, and the making of political identities within Indian political culture. I also turned to the work of Julia Kristeva to explore the interplay between external and internal processes in Nandy’s work. I explored Nandy’s sensitivity to the positioning of boundaries and the inclusions and exclusions that result
from these by turning to Kristeva’s concepts of the abject and abjection. The abject and abjection, at least as they were applied in this inquiry, denote fascination and horror as a real and potential threat that can radically disrupt the boundaries of subjectivity. Applying this to Nandy’s work allows for a more complex analysis of the positioning of boundaries within subjectivity, central to Nandy’s work, his intellectual identity and significance. In addition to this, I used Kristeva’s conceptualisation of processes of analytic revolt to characterise Nandy’s psychoanalytic mode. Drawing on these concepts in this way added another layer of complexity for considering the way in which the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work can be theorised and characterised. In using these psychoanalytic concepts to build a case about Nandy and his work, also affirmed the importance of psychoanalytic methods for social and political criticism.

The inquiry into the psychoanalytic focus of Nandy’s work and the methods he adopts to actuate these perspectives was structured by three key questions. Firstly, I questioned how this psychoanalytic focus underpinning Nandy’s critique of secularism takes form. This was detailed in *Part A, The Pathologies of Secularism*, where this approach was explored through the confrontations he enters into to critique the psychic life of secularism operating in Indian political culture and within political identities. For Nandy the pathologies of secularism are to be found in the way that religious and ethnic identities are made over through processes of subjection. The consequences of these pathologies are many, including secularism’s inability to safeguard tolerance and social and political amity. His analysis of secularism details the ways the effects of these distortions of the ideology perpetuate the political conditions that give rise to xenophobia and fanaticism. Thus his critique of Hindu nationalism also demonstrates the effects of these distortions, through the way concepts of Indianness are made over in monocultural terms as a fixed identity category. This for Nandy forecloses ambivalence and contradiction within human subjectivity and within Indian traditions and culture.

I argued that where a critic like Nandy can be distinguished in the debates of secularism, and where the value of his critique of secularism is to be found, is in his willing confrontation with this dominant secular ideal. Nandy confronts the ways in which the secular ideal operates to define political identities and Indian political culture. In Nandy’s account the imposition of the secular ideal into Indian society makes over individual and collective identities according to the aims of this ideal. The dominant ideal defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operating within political
identities and in politics. It is these inclusions and exclusions that are confronted in Nandy’s account and in doing so; he calls for a re-claiming of concepts of ambivalence within subjectivity and within concepts of Indianness. In confronting the boundaries of secular political culture in these ways Nandy’s critique enters into a fascinating, though as I argued, equally horrifying invitation to challenge the inclusions and exclusions operating in secularism. It is also an invitation to challenge the way in which the debates on secularism are carried out. Nandy, as is characteristic of his approach, equally confronts what can and cannot be publicly acknowledged within this intellectual culture, including the possibilities of imagining alternatives to a dominant secular ideal. Nandy’s commitment to confrontation therefore reveals itself in a number of ways. This is evident through Nandy’s capacity to confront and moreover, work through dominant and established meanings, identities, ideals, fantasies and projections. This takes place in his critique of secularism, for instance, in the way that he confronts and works through the psychological and viability of secularism in India. However, this capacity for confrontation also extends to his ability to confront and work through the defences operating in the debates on secularism, as he challenges the normative boundaries defining debate and audible dissent.

There are though significant consequences that result from Nandy’s capacity to confront and work through the effects of the distortions of the dominant secular ideal. The second question I explored in the dissertation was to consider the consequences that result from this. In Part B, Symptomatic Responses Reading the Politics of Blame, I offered a reading of a selection of responses and representations of Nandy’s work and his identity have received within the debates on Indian secularism. I questioned to what extent Nandy’s confronting arguments, ideas and moreover, his confronting approach is engaged with and the significance that is attached to this. I suggested that debating secularism in India during the 1990s was marked by a period of national reflection. It was also a period of forced engagement with the rise of Hindu nationalism and the outbreaks of political violence that radically threatened the secularity of the Indian nation state. The events that unfolded in Ayodhya and Gujarat affirmed for Nandy, that secularism is not only in crisis, but complicit in producing the political conditions for the pathologies of fanaticism and xenophobia to flourish. Nandy’s anti-secular position, first detailed in the early 1980s, along with his critique of Hindu nationalism, acquired a
renewed interest during this time and his contributions to debating secularism, a particular significance.

As a vocal critic of the state and the inherited secular ideal in India, Nandy found himself cast as a disruptive and threatening voice within these debates. This disruption and threat was validated by representations of him as the leading anti-secular and anti-modern voice in India. This anti-secularism was further consolidated by Nandy’s perceived culturalism, traditionalism and calls for a return to a pre-modern India, which demonstrated as certain critics argue, his complicity with Hindutva ideology and the politics of the Hindu Right. Although not unfamiliar to controversy and what he describes are “savage attacks,” I suggested that this renewed interest in him was worthy of further consideration.¹ This task was entered into not to advance a correct reading of Nandy’s position and representations of him and his work within these debates. Rather the focus was to illustrate how these responses and representations are organised around Nandy’s confronting, threatening and disruptive ideas, typically at the expense of acknowledging and engaging with his methods.

I suggested that there was more than academic quibbling at stake here as a persecutory logic develops and structures these responses and representations of Nandy, within a politics of blame. Consistent with the persecutory and narcissistic logic, Nandy’s identity as critic is represented as threatening and disruptive within these debates. For instance, as the theorist Akeel Bilgrami argues, Nandy’s disruption needs to be understood in terms of the way that he “derails all meaningful debate.”² I argued that such responses are over-determined by the threat and disruption that Nandy carries forward into these debates, and typically do not engage with his confronting ideas, arguments and methods. As a result these responses and representations are expressed within a symptomatic register, functioning as a defence against the real and perceived threat and danger that Nandy represents. In attempting to marginalise and de-authorise Nandy as critic in these ways, it is his overwhelming threat of disruption that is defended against. I suggested that Nandy’s identity as critic is made over, taking on characteristics akin to the Freudian phobic object. Consistent with the operation of phobia, Nandy’s threat is deemed radically threatening and disruptive to concepts of

self, or rather accepted and preferred self-understandings and self-representations of self. Characterising Nandy’s overwhelming threat and disruption was supplemented further by applying Kristeva’s concept of abjection. Although this concept denotes a specific moment in pre-symbolic subjectivity within her work, I argued that it is a useful concept to think through the way that Nandy is denied subjectivity and intellectual significance in these debates. Cast as the abject figure, Nandy’s threat and disruption takes on an additional intensity as that which can disrupt boundaries, including the boundaries between subject and object.

I argued that the disruption and ambivalence that Nandy characteristically addresses in his work and as a feature of his identity as critic are met with both horror and fascination. For instance, horror is expressed in terms of Nandy’s regressive anti-secularism, the repudiation of his intellectual significance as a scholar, his lack of morality and his complicity with not only an intellectual proto-Gandhian culturalism, but also with pan Hindu revivalist political forces. Fascination too is never far behind demonstrated through the level of attention his work continues to receive. This fascination continues despite his status, at least within these debates of secularism as the maligned anti-secularist, anti-modernist, provocateur or romantic voice. Fascination and horror may earmark the subject’s state of instability in abjection, but this instability also provides the very conditions for the possibility to rupture and regenerate meaning and subjectivity. As I argued it is Nandy’s capacity to confront that, which is deemed abject as a feature of his own work and identity as critic, that produces in turn a confronting reflexivity and self-reflexivity that disarms critics in these over-determined ways.

The question as to how Nandy is able to confront and work through these issues, at the border between culture and psyche has been afforded little attention in the existing literature written about him. I argued that while existing secondary literature addresses the critical features of Nandy’s work and identity a more complex engagement with the psychoanalytic methods already present in the voice of the political psychologist, was needed. In the final part of the dissertation Part C, Critical Interventions Towards the Psychotherapeutic I addressed this by characterising the importance of Nandy’s psychoanalytic approach as a psychoanalytic mode of critical engagement. I argued that the confrontation and working through that Nandy enters into, is a feature of his work and identity as critic. However, this confrontation and working through and autonomy of thought that his work demonstrates also necessitate a
confrontation and working through of self, of Nandy’s own identity. Kristeva’s concept of revolt was introduced in order to characterise the relationship between ideas, method and the identity of the critic. I suggested that a key feature of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating in Nandy’s work was in the ways that this rupturing and regeneration of meaning and subjectivity, informed his identity as critic. I argued that Nandy in and through this mode of critical analytic engagement is able to rupture and regenerate meaning, and hence resist the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology. This extends to a capacity to resist, rupture, and regenerate the meanings associated with subjectivity, including his identity as critic. I thus also developed the argument that Nandy, in and through the psychoanalytic mode as revolt, is able to resist abjection through these processes of rupturing and regenerating subjectivity.

I suggested that this psychoanalytic mode as revolt, referencing internal and external processes, is a permanent feature of Nandy’s work and identity. Further I explored how the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operates in two different examples of Nandy’s work. As someone whose intellectual identity is firmly inside the issues he responds to, this confronting and working through of self, reveals itself as essential to Nandy’s method in producing critical analytic perspectives. I therefore argued that this questioning and regeneration of the possibilities of dissent in Nandy’s work were indicative of deeper internal processes at work: more akin to a revolt. In regenerating the boundaries of revolt from its exclusively political foundations, Kristeva politicises the psychotherapeutic possibilities within revolt. Situated within psychoanalytic process, revolt denotes processes of anamnesis, of a retrospective questioning and retrospective return in order to regenerate our understanding of ourselves, and in doing so our relation to ourselves and to others. Revolt as a psychoanalytic concept denotes a series of processes which safeguard our individual and collective capacities to rupture, question, and challenge, confront, and work through established values, norms, assumptions, associations within psychic life, and to this extent to regenerate meaning and significance. Through these processes of anamnesis and retrospective questioning revolt thus references processes, which lead to the goal of a psychic re-birth. This possibility of a re-birth (of a rupturing and regeneration of self) is however, deeply confronting as much as it is therapeutic, because it places us face to face with our own internal resistances. These resistances if not attended to can foreclose these processes of working through from taking place, and from placing us in revolt. For instance, in
Kristeva’s account, and its application to theorise the defences of secularism in Nandy’s work, this is marked by a profound willingness not to know. Nonetheless, once these resistances are worked through in the psychoanalytic sense, psychic re-birth, and the regeneration of subjectivity is made possible. This confrontation and traversal of resistances within self, places us in revolt, and for Kristeva, enables recognition of our own intimate radical alterity. This in turn facilitates an ability to live with and live through the ambivalence, contradictions and ambiguities that mark human subjectivity.

Nandy too I argued celebrates these critical and reflexive capacities of revolt. Notably I suggested that there are strong affinities between working through these resistances in a psychoanalytic therapy and the way Nandy works through the cultural and psychic resistances that otherwise block an appreciation of the damage and distortions that the ideology of the Indian secular state has entailed. In characterising Nandy’s approach in this way, I argued that he enters into these processes of revolt as the method of generating social and political criticism. The psychoanalytic mode as revolt enables Nandy to question, rupture and regenerate meanings, including subjectivity. These processes are for Kristeva therapeutic processes because they are regenerative and also carry forward the possibility of infinite re-creation and regeneration. To this extent these processes of revolt also safeguard against the dangers and radical evil of homogenisation, standardisation and stagnation within psychic life. Where abjection as an affective state of instability threatens the subject (Kristeva’s subject-in-process) with the disruption of being lost in the borderlands between subject and object, “the not yet entitled subject,” the suspension of revolt, therefore denotes the end of subjectivity. In applying revolt to describe the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work and identity, the therapeutic is also present. This was explored in terms of Nandy’s ability to generate perspectives that sensitise us to the therapeutic possibilities of these processes of rupture and regeneration or re-articulation. Nandy is therefore able to produce perspectives, which resists the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology. This can make us, as Kristeva claims, “receptive, expectant, mobile…there’s a specific kind of humanity…attentive to its own and other people’s revolts.”

3 Kristeva privileges the psychotherapeutic clinical experience here in sensitising the subject to the possibilities of revolt. Kristeva describes the effects of these psychoanalytic processes of revolt in the following way: “But I note that people who have had therapy – even when it’s more of less complete, by definition it’s never really over – are perfectly lucid about their maladies and limitations, as well as those
Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Prakash affirm that Nandy’s perspectives encourage them to ask questions, and to challenge accepted norms as much as they “offer guidance in the regeneration and re-enchantment of our own selves.” In Makarand Paranjape’s words, “It helps us think categories, change our perception of things and eventually look at the world afresh.” These critical analytic perspectives, which Nandy produces, confronts and works through the rupturing of established, dominant and hegemonic norms, meanings, ideas and identities. This rupturing takes place in order to regenerate and re-articulate these meanings and the field of possible significance; what I suggested is instituted in alternative political imaginaries. The therapeutic aspect of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt is in the way a recovery of alternatives takes place in the perspectives that Nandy generates. Perspectives which we can also conclude lead to a recovery of alternatives not only for the self, but always and necessarily in tandem with a recognition, of our own radical alterity and of the other.

Again it is worth re-stating that revolt denotes processes that cannot be simplified as those of a contrarian’s or reduced to a reactionary voice. Nandy as a thinker and writer in revolt is through the operation of this mode, intellectually committed to more complex internal and external processes. This includes building upon a mode of analysis predicated on an internal estrangement from the certitudes of knowledge and certitudes of fixed identities. For estrangement from one’s self, from dominant parts of one’s self, or as Nandy references from over-socialised parts of oneself are the conditions of revolt. Revolt signifies this complex dialectical process, what Nandy notes is the necessary counter-intuitive element within critical social and political criticism. As Celia Sjoholm explains, “in forcing me towards the other in me, it will push me towards an alterity that will force me to question, interrogate and think, activities that in themselves must be reconsidered.”

See Julia Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2002): 68.


6 In Kristeva’s reading of these psychoanalytic concepts this appears as negativity. This account of negativity is not between two subjects, but exists within each subject, within ourselves. For a discussion of negativity in revolt refer to Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis Volume 2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Julia Kristeva, The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

7 Celia Sjoholm, Kristeva and the Political, (2005): 112.
“transcendental intuition of the other.” It is therefore, a profoundly therapeutic mode of analysis because it rejects the possibility of defence as meaningful social and political criticism. It also differentiates Nandy’s intellectual efforts, as in his critique of secularism from those responses predicated on deeply ingrained resistances to confrontation and in defending the dominant secular ideal. In Nandy’s analysis of these continuing defences, defence of the secular ideal must be understood as operating on both individual and collective levels, for it is not separable from deeper fears of democracy, and fears of the post-secular operating in Indian political culture. For Nandy the reproduction of these defences must be confronted and worked through because they “limit the play with self-definitions, ego boundaries and identity fragments that is needed to unleash the potentialities of a culture of participatory democracy.” I suggested that even this commitment to processes of democratic pluralism need to be understood alongside his commitment to processes of revolt. Further, they need to be understood alongside safeguarding against processes of stagnation, homogenisation and standardisation and the radical evil of the suspension of thought in psychic life. The defence of democracy and what he terms is “the democratic art of the possible,” can therefore be conceptualised as a feature and effect of this psychoanalytic mode as revolt, as Nandy brings into his analysis aspects of self and society that resist the distortions of the effects of dominant ideologies.

Having travelled this journey from pathologies, symptoms to the psychotherapeutic this dissertation theorised the relationship between ideas and method in Ashis Nandy’s work and identity as critic. I offered a reading of his work, beginning with his critique of secularism and his contributions to these intellectual debates of Indian secularism. In providing a characterisation of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt operating within and across his work, I put forward that Nandy as the critical analytic intellectual produces distinctive critical analytic perspectives. Is it a happy coincidence we might then ask that I have applied a concept to characterise these critical efforts,

8 Celia Sjoholm states that, “such a transcendental intuition of the other, argues Kristeva, will show itself as revolt.” Celia Sjoholm, Ibid., 112.
10 Nandy explains this connection in the following way: “For example, in a democracy there are certain obligations whether you like it or not for “the democratic art of the possible.” I would have been perfectly comfortable living in a hyper-modern world using that language, because I was brought up in that language. But I know that in “the democratic art of the possible” you cannot expect that language to go very far. I mean clearly it only enriches drawing room debates and class room debates.” Christine Defferes, “Conversations with Ashis Nandy: Session IV,” (Unpublished Interviews. New Delhi, India, 2005): 31.
which although developed in Julia Kristeva’s account of revolt, have their origins in the Indic civilisation? Kristeva in her efforts to regenerate the meaning of revolt within her commitment to psychoanalysis reclaims a meaning of the word that is not just political. She also interprets this word in an etymological sense. Kristeva states, “The word revolt comes from a Sanskrit root that means to discover, open, but also to turn, to return. This meaning also refers to the revolution of the earth around the sun, for example. It has an astronomical meaning, the eternal return.” This offers yet another twist and turn, much like revolt itself, to consider Nandy’s identity as critic of the state. To what extent might this psychoanalytic mode as revolt be an effort to return or rather to re-claim aspects of oneself, in this case a pre-modern self, that still exists within the modern Indian intellectual?

9.1 Social and Political Criticism and the Future of Revolt

The therapeutic features of this psychoanalytic mode of engagement in Nandy’s work provide an approach for social and political criticism that extends beyond the work of the individual. Revolt, Kristeva reminds us “is the questioning and displacement of the past. The future if it exists,” she continues, “depends on it.” The concept of revolt as explored within Kristeva’s account and in its application to describe the psychoanalytic mode operating in Nandy’s work, reinforces the continuities between the past, present and future. For Kristeva and for Nandy, more importantly, the future does not necessarily contain a predictive test or what we might call a projective test. Celia Sjoholm, writing on these issues further supports this view when she notes the internal dialectic at work within these processes of revolt. Sjoholm argues that, “the future of the revolt is not futural or a projective vision, but the establishment of a displacing return, a permanence of the function of negativity, challenging and reconstructing given presuppositions.” She continues to connect these processes of revolt to protecting us from what Freud has cautioned is the future of an illusion. The future of revolt then consistent within its definition is only made possible through a permanent state of questioning, in the continuation of processes that place us in revolt.

12 Julia Kristeva, Ibid., 5.
For Kristeva a culture of revolt is needed, where these permanent processes of questioning are instituted within social and political criticism, as a continuing and dynamic antidote to the suspension of thought and representation. In suggesting that a figure like Nandy demonstrates this commitment through his ability to actuate critical perspectives that contribute to a culture of revolt, I have therefore also commented on the enduring features of this psychoanalytic mode. As a mode of social and political criticism grounded in a culture of revolt, Nandy’s work, his intellectual identity and significance can be evaluated within his capacity to resist the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology and the future of an illusion.

In Nandy’s work I argued that this is a consistent and permanent feature of the psychoanalytic mode as revolt, as this enables him to generate critical analytic perspectives that resist the effects of the distortions of a dominant ideology. This mode in activating these processes of revolt produces critical perspectives where this awareness, receptivity, sensitivity, and openness can follow. Where, what we might note human choices and the choices to confront the future of an illusion, are expanded. As Nandy argues “…reconceptualizing political, social and cultural ends; by identifying emerging or previously ignored social pathologies that have to be understood, contained or transcended; by linking up the fates of different polities and societies through envisioning their common fears and hopes.”

In a world where estrangement from others, including estrangement from self is increasingly complicated by global threats of terror, the methods we adopt to characterise and theorise these threats, is a fundamental question. It is a question that this dissertation has attempted to offer a response to, by advancing a case for social and political criticism actuated through a psychoanalytic mode as revolt. Within this mode of generating critique, there is also an invitation to radically question where and how inclusions and exclusions are positioned, including within our own subjectivity. For consistent with this critical analytic approach the enemy appears increasingly within; that is within self and within societies. I have explored some of these tensions in relation to an enemy within India who is cast as a confronting and threatening figure, along with the confronting claims advanced in his work. Through this case study of the Indian political psychologist Ashis Nandy, I have located these confronting features within the processes of revolt that underpin the mode of critical intervention he enters

into to generate social and political criticism. It is important to note though, that although I have characterised this mode by affirming Nandy’s commitment to psychoanalytic processes of revolt this does not foreclose his commitment to maintaining the dynamism of these internal resources. The internal resources include the dynamism within the psychic life of the individual and collectively within societies or cultures of revolt. In addition, there is for Nandy dynamism within the internal resources of Indian traditions and culture that survives as the underside of Indian political culture. It is within these latent features of Indian traditions and culture that a culture of revolt can be found. This commitment to the internal resources of self and within societies, cultures and traditions that rupture and regenerate meaning and significance, is articulated in a therapeutic register. It is then, we might conclude, a moment of agreeable symmetry in noting that Nandy’s work and intellectual identity is not innocent of a double legacy of revolt. I described this legacy as a modern psychoanalytic concept derived etymologically from a Sanskrit root, but whose inner dynamics continue to question, challenge and twist and turn its constitutive meanings. This is a continuation of the Freudian idea that the return to oneself, actuated through these processes of revolt, can never hide behind the certitudes of inclusions and exclusions, nor within a future of illusions. For re-imagining the cultural politics of selfhood, becomes yet another starting point for social and political criticism to establish the future of revolt.
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