



Challenging the Warrior Culture

Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* as a Classic Post-Colonial Study of M. K. Gandhi's Non-Violent and Androgynous Anti-Colonialism

Some of the biggest problems Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961) had to face during his era as Secretary-General of the United Nations arose from the incomplete – and purely political – decolonisation that reshaped the post-war world and was still at its very beginning in Africa in the 1950s and early 1960s. In particular, the Congo crisis – and the fact that Hammarskjöld could not solve it with all the United Nations resources, international peace enforcement troops and diplomatic experience he had at his disposal – show that on economic grounds forms of neo-colonialism prevailed to a greater or lesser extent even after formal independence, and were already evident immediately after independence.

The Indian sociologist and social psychologist Ashis Nandy (born 1937), one of the founders of the now worldwide discipline of post-colonial studies, argues that this economic neo-colonialism was accompanied by a prevailing colonial consciousness and culture within the minds of the ex-colonised as well as their governments' policies in post-colonial societies. According to the now almost classical interpretation of M. K. Gandhi's (1869-1948) anti-colonialism in his book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery*

of Self Under Colonialism, published in 1983,¹ Ashis Nandy argues that the old colonial 'empires' had fallen, but colonial ideological thought and culture had prevailed and is today even enjoying a renaissance.

The kshatriya (warrior) dominates minds – and governments!

Nandy establishes in his book that the armed 'counter-players' of colonialism – as he calls them – were never really outside the framework of consciousness that colonialism produced; instead, they had remained completely inside the imperialist, modern and industrial-civilisational framework. The counter-players had practised a form of anti-colonialism that adopted the main institutions, thoughts and habits of behaviour of colonial culture and pursued them on their own behalf. For Nandy, central here is the culture of violence, arising from the adoption by post-colonial countries of the patriarchal, warrior-like characteristics and institutions of the former colonial rulers. M. K. Gandhi had denounced this ten-

¹ See Nandy, Ashis, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983.

Gandhi on the way to see the Viceroy at Simla, June 1945

gency of armed anti-colonialism in his only programmatic, theoretical work, the radical *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, which was banned in India immediately after its publication in 1909. Therein, Gandhi had criticised the advocates of armed resistance for wanting 'English rule without the Englishman; the tiger's nature, but not the tiger'.²

Nowadays, European and US media and politicians are quick to shake their heads in dismay at the problems of former colonies in Africa and to behave as if the military dictatorships in these countries had nothing to do with them. For a short time only, from 1947 to approximately 1960, Africa looked as if it was heading towards a truly decolonised future. This era is remembered nowadays by Africans in a misty-eyed way, accompanied by nostalgia in the face of the cruel realities of today's Africa – witness, for example, the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of independence in Ghana, the first African country to be decolonised, in 1957.³ During this period, African anti-colonialism was still marked by Gandhi's ideas:

Gandhi's ideas and methods were a strong formative influence in the history of African nationalism and Black militancy. The West African Congress was established in 1920; its founders were inspired by the example of the Indian National Congress. In the 1930s the course of the Indian nationalist struggle under Gandhi's leadership was being closely followed in other parts of the British empire. In the 1940s Kwame

Nkrumah of the Gold Coast (later Ghana) was 'toying with Gandhi's ideas on non-violent campaigns and dreaming about translating them into action'. In 1958, when the All-Africa People's Conference met in the newly independent state of Ghana, the Gandhian ideas were still relatively so popular in Africa that the Algerian National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, represented by Frantz Fanon [1925-1961]), engaged in a revolt against the French, had much difficulty in securing for their armed struggle legitimacy and support.⁴

Another anti-colonial leader who adopted the ideas of Gandhi was Kenneth Kaunda (born 1924) of Zambia. As late as 1961 he ran a civil disobedience campaign, which marked the path to Zambia's independence in 1964.

But from the beginning of the 1960s, Gandhi's impact diminished for several reasons. Firstly, leaders who had previously drawn on Gandhi's legacy were rapidly degenerating into dictators after seizing state power, relying on a personality cult and causing economic crisis. Nkrumah established one-party rule in 1964, Kaunda in 1968.

Secondly, the impact of Gandhi's ideas withered away in the face of armed liberation wars such as those in Algeria, Guinea-Bissau and Angola. After 1960, the number of casualties rose considerably as the level of violence and counter-violence within the struggles increased. This tendency will be illustrated here through a comparison of

2 Gandhi, M. K., *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, 1909, Chapter 4, cited after www.mkgandhi.org/index.htm.

3 See for example 'Der afrikanische Fluch', *Der Spiegel*, 16/2007, pp. 110-112.

4 Nanda, B. R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985, pp. 32-33.

two massacres. The first is the massacre carried out by British colonial troops in Amritsar on April 6th, 1919. Official figures estimate today that the soldiers serving under Brigadier-General Dyer killed 379 unarmed persons and left 1,200 wounded (the Indian National Congress (INC) enquiry held immediately after the massacre reported 1,200 killed and 3,600 wounded). There were immediate investigations, enquiry commissions, publications, and international debate. The Amritsar massacre triggered the first non-cooperation movement (1920–22) against British colonial rule in India and is still remembered in India today, along with demands for official apologies by the British.⁵ It was the only massacre on such a scale by colonial troops during the era of the independence movement (1918–1947), although repression immediately after Amritsar was fierce and, furthermore, it could easily be argued that Britain as the colonial power was responsible, for example, for the estimated 1.5 to 3 million deaths during the Bengal famine of 1943, quite apart from the death toll arising from the Partition of India and Pakistan. On the Indian side – evidently, one should say – there was nothing comparable in the way of physical attacks on British citizens.

At the end of the 1950s, however, the ongoing Algerian war considerably raised the level of cruelty and increased the number of casualties within anti-colonial movements. French colonial troops were responsible for various massacres of the Amritsar type. But already at this stage the Algerian ‘counter-players’ were also very much involved in crimes normally supposed to be the prov-

ince of colonial warfare and the forces of repression. Already on April 13th, 1956, there had been the Tifraten massacre, nowadays known as ‘Red Night’, when ‘several hundred’ (other sources cite 490) anti-colonial Messalists – militants and supporters of Messali Hadj (1898–1974) – were killed by the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in its fratricidal war to get rid of the rival opposition and present itself as Algeria’s sole liberation force.⁶

Less than a year later, on May 28th, 1957, the Melouza massacre occurred, resulting in 379 casualties (other sources say 303), likewise inflicted by the FLN on unarmed Messalist sympathisers.⁷ This took place in the hamlet of Mechta-Kasba near the village of Beni Ilmane, some distance from Melouza. Young Frantz Fanon had become the press spokesman for the FLN just a few days before. His first public act was to blame the French colonial troops for the massacre and describe the FLN forces as victims, although he was fully aware that the reverse was the case: ‘The foul machinations over Melouza (...) show the extent of the French authorities’ cynicism and monstrous perfidy. The description of the Melouza massacre suggests that it was carefully stage-managed (...), there is an obvious wish to blame the FLN for an absurd and horrible massacre.’⁸ The world generally, and the international soli-

6 See Brother John, ‘Die Besiegten und Vergessenen des Algerienkrieges. Messali Hadj (1898–1974) und die „Messalisten“ (Teil 2)’, *Graswurzelrevolution*, non-violent-anarchist journal, No. 297, March 2005. See <http://www.graswurzel.net/297/index.html>

7 Ibid.

8 See press statement of 4 June 1957, by Frantz Fanon for the FLN, and printed in *Le Monde*, 5 June 1957; see especially Macey, David, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, Granta Books, London, 2000, pp. 353–355, quotation p. 354.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 34–41.

darity movement and French anti-colonial leftist intellectuals in particular, remained silent for a long time, the only people to protest and demand an investigation being Messali Hadj and Albert Camus.

It took Algerian historians 26 years – from independence to the beginning of the period of democratic opening-up (1988–1992) – even to speak of Messali Hadj and to concede who actually had committed the massacre. Fanon biographer David Macey writes: ‘Shortly after these events, wilaya III’s Colonel Mohammed Saïd was quietly recalled in Tunis. In October 1988, Saïd admitted in an interview on Algerian television that he had ordered the Melouza massacre. The Melouza incident caused a degree of soul-searching on the part of the French left, with some asking the FLN to supply proof that it was not responsible and others trying hard to convince themselves that the killings were “individual acts” born of despair and fanaticism or acts of cruelty on the part of individuals driven mad by rage at the atrocities that had been inflicted on them in the course of the war. The FLN remained silent.’⁹ During the fratricidal war between the anti-colonial Messalists and the anti-colonial FLN, 12,000 people were killed.¹⁰

Furthermore, Fanon, for his part, was involved in the killing of the most famous leader of the FLN, Abane Ramdane (1920–1957). Ramdane had at first been one of the most determined militants in the war against the Messalists, but in August 1957

in Cairo, at a meeting with adversaries including Boussouf and Belkacem Krim, he insisted on the primacy of the political over the military within the FLN. He lost his case and was killed for opposing military primacy. Abane Ramdane was strangled to death at the end of 1957 in Morocco ‘having been lured to Morocco on the pretext that there was important business to be settled there. His assassins were two of “Boussouf’s boys” (...)’, Macey relates. The FLN, trying to cover up the internal killing, created in their journal *El Moudjahid* a huge mythical framework in which Abane Ramdane died a martyr’s death in a battle against the French. Fanon, Macey asserts, ‘was close enough to the “information services” to know the truth about Abane’s death’. Later, talking to Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), Fanon ‘clearly felt some responsibility for the fate of Abane. This implies that he thought that he could have prevented him from going to Morocco, and that in turn implies that he knew or strongly suspected what was going to happen there. Beauvoir certainly gained the impression that he knew far more than he would or could say about the grimmer secrets of the Algerian Revolution. (...) As late as the beginning of the 1990s, schoolchildren in Algeria were still being taught that Abane Ramdane was one of the Revolution’s martyrs.’¹¹

All this – consciously defending massacres and political murder on one’s own side – Fanon had already as part of his baggage and on his mind when he represented the FLN in 1958 at the All-Africa People’s Conference in Ghana, trying to convince fellow anti-colonialist representatives of the ideo-

⁹ Macey, David, see note 8, p. 354.

¹⁰ See Harbi, Mohammed, former FLN official, ‘FLN contre MNA, une mémoire sanglante’ and ‘Combien de victimes?’, *Le Monde*, 28 April.2004, special edition on the war in Algeria.

¹¹ Macey, David, see note 8, pp. 356–357.

logical, ethical and practical weaknesses of Gandhi's method of combating colonialism, and encouraging them to take up armed struggle as the radical anti-colonial alternative, as he saw it.

Within the Indian National Congress (INC), during 30 years of sometimes fierce debates and quarrels between the different anti-colonial factions, sometimes resulting in exclusions from the membership, not one militant – whether high- or low-ranking – was killed in internal political or tactical strife. This is historically so self-evident that nobody even talks about it in India. Yet, it is a unique achievement within national liberation movements all over the world and, obviously, due to the nonviolent culture of the anti-colonial movement in India. In contrast, the conduct of Fanon and the armed 'counter-players', from the outset, could rival the worst atrocities committed by the British colonial power in India. Their mode of resistance inaugurated decades of civil war in many African countries, continuing in some of them to this day.

There is a third reason for the decline of Gandhi's impact in Africa: the intensification of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1960s, and the pathological suspicion on the part of the US administration of any independent tendency by an African country to become another Cuba and thereby strengthen the Soviet Union. In 1961, Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), the young elected prime minister of Congo and one of the leading lights of young Africa in the decolonising period, was killed. Already in this incident, Colonel Mobutu (1930-1997) had had a hand. Mobutu took power through a military coup in 1965. He then ruled in 'Congo-Kinshasa/

Zaire' for long decades, until 1997. Under Mobutu, Zaire became a kind of self-service store for this dictator, whose assets were estimated as close to 5,000 million dollars. Zaire likewise became a frontline state of the CIA in the Cold War. After Mobutu's decline and death, the country was afflicted by years of catastrophic civil war.

The personality cult of Mobutu ran like this: according to self-made propaganda he should have been regarded as the 'almighty warrior, who strings together conquest after conquest by his persistence' and his byname had the meaning of 'the strong cockerel who never leaves a hen unmounted'.¹²

Here we obviously recognise two elements that Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* focuses on as shaping elements of colonial consciousness: a heroic warrior culture or elements of sheer warlordism; and a pathological, patriarchal-masculinist concept of self.

But governmental think-tanks and the official media of former colonisers or the US are now separating their history from their own implication in the degeneration of Africa under dictatorial regimes. Maybe, this will be next to impossible in the case of Mobutu's Zaire. But in other countries of Africa, oppositional 'counter-players' are very much welcome for the role they play in legitimising that separation. So everyone in the West points to Robert Mugabe – former freedom fighter, now longtime dictator of devastated Zimbabwe, preserving his dictatorship in opposition to the West. Ashis Nandy shows in *The Intimate Enemy* how

¹² See 'Fluch der Finsternis', *Der Spiegel*, 20/2007, p. 136.

such ‘counter-players’ are entirely part of the ideological culture of the old colonial powers and post-colonial thought. Today, this is shown again and again by the ease with which certain dictators or formerly anti-colonial militarist regimes are able to cross the so-called abyss between the status of anti-colonial opponent and that of ally of the West. Gaddafi’s new pro-Western direction or the ideological turnaround of the military leaders in Algeria, rewarded in arms support by former colonial power France, are telling examples of the warrior-like affinity that is a central clue in Ashis Nandy’s interpretation of Gandhi as being fundamentally opposed to colonial as well as ‘counter-player’ warrior culture.

The fiction of ideological separation is useful to the West and permits Western powerholders the possibility of assuming a certain innocence – essentially ‘inauthentic’, as Ashis Nandy would say – and thereby even posing as generous protectors of elections via UN interventionism, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo recently. At the same time, the causes of, and blame for, African misery are laid entirely at Africa’s door. The end of that logic is already to be seen in the think-tanks of the United States, where a team of political scientists – offspring of Samuel P. Huntington and his thesis of a ‘clash of civilisations’ – under the guidance of Stephen Krasner is planning to ‘recolonise nations in misery’. Krasner calls this mission ‘post-modern imperialism’. The White House has a framework with action plans for the renovation of about 25 crisis-ridden or ‘failed’ states. To that end, the United Nations is supposed to take over the sovereignty of these states – as it did in East Timor and Kosovo, cited as arche-

typal examples of UN intervention, which in principal could also occur in all African states. Whether these archetypes were really functioning or not is of minor importance; in Kosovo, for example, nothing has been solved, and an independent Kosovo might trigger a new crisis or even civil war. Worse, the plan gambles with the United Nation’s Blue Helmets as mere replacement troops for NATO – or proposes deployment of US troops, in a further phase of ‘post-modern imperialism’ – as was already the case in the Yugoslav civil war in the 1990s.¹³

Thus functions the Intimate Enemy – colonial consciousness, the post-colonial consciousness of the ‘counter-players’ and the neo-colonial consciousness of the West today – all of which Ashis Nandy calls pathological, because it shapes the thought structures of citizens in Western states as well as post-colonial societies and damages them at the same time. Here, Nandy returns to a necessity Gandhi formulated: that not only the colonised but also the colonisers have to be freed from colonial thinking and its pathologies. Even in post-colonial societies, there is practically no awareness of the Intimate Enemy, as shown in a survey carried out by the magazine *New African*, whose African readers selected Robert Mugabe as the third most meaningful African of all times, after Mandela and Nkrumah.¹⁴

If Ashis Nandy speaks in his preface to *The Intimate Enemy* of 1983 of the ‘modern technological marvels’, which could be renamed World War II or Vietnam, we can nowadays continue the line of argument and talk

13 See ‘Der afrikanische Fluch’, *Der Spiegel*, 16/2007, p. 128.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

of the modern technological marvels of the war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan. The undampened, omnipotent consciousness and patriarchal, warrior-culture arrogance of Western capitalist industrial nations on the one side corresponds on the other side with the recent news that British schools no longer teach students about Gandhi – because of his supposed irrelevance.¹⁵

In post-colonial India the situation cannot be judged to be any better. The government of Prime Minister Vajpayee, which was led by the Hindu-nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (Indian People's Party; BJP) and was in power from 1998 to 2004, carried out nuclear tests in a nuclear arms race with Pakistan, thereby upgrading India to the status of a nuclear power at the level of the United States. This government has to be held responsible for the Gujarat pogroms in 2002 against the Indian Muslim minority, the worst orgy of communal violence and state-induced terrorism since the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992, which was likewise triggered by the BJP's militaristic policies.

The BJP's cultural politics when they were in government rehabilitated the Hindu nationalist murderer of Gandhi, Nathuram Godse (1910–1949), who argued in his defence speech before the court for a strong, central Hindu-led nation-state and accused Gandhi of having a backward, non-rational outlook. Godse was a member of the paramilitarist and fundamentalist Hindu Mahasabha and of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (National Association of Volunteers; RSS),

15 Information received from Ashok Swain, end of July 2007, Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

which still exists today. In *The Intimate Enemy*, as in more recent political articles and comments, Ashis Nandy draws attention to the paramilitarist recruiting policies of the RSS among the youth and to the fact that the governmental policies of the BJP were by no means protectionist-conservative or culturally traditional – as might have been expected – but offensively neoliberal and aggressively modernist, like those of no previous government. Young IT experts, a privileged, ascending minority group, was attracted by BJP's political slogan of a 'Shining India' – a model that has, argues Nandy, nothing to do with the lived realities of the masses of the Indian people, 60 to 70 per cent of whom still live in the countryside – and who consequently voted the BJP out of government in 2004.

In an article written in 1991, Ashis Nandy contrasted the ideology of Hindu nationalism, or Hindu fundamentalism, called *Hindutva* (living according to Hindu rules and regulations, set by the higher – priest and warrior – castes), with the reality of a hybrid, multi-faceted popular Hinduism and predicted a 'struggle for life or death' between the two. The ideologists of *Hindutva*, Nandy argues, have always been jealous of the practical way in which Hinduism is actually lived by the simple Hindu. *Hindutva*, in contrast, is not a lifestyle, but is based on the reformed Hinduism of the 19th century – that is, it is a 'counter-player' reaction to colonialism. This so-called 'reformed' Hinduism has invented a mythical golden age in the past, several hundred or even a thousand years ago, where the warrior caste, the *kshatriya*, ruled and their values were culturally dominant. From the viewpoint of their ideologues, contemporary colonial India

was populated by weak, degenerate, ‘effeminate’ Hindus and therefore an easy prey for the British colonisers. Hinduism during the period of reform, just like *Hindutva* today, demands a tightly contained, monolithic, almost monotheistic and centrally organised religion obedient to masculine values – only such a religion is supposed to be capable of coping with Western monotheisms:

Hindutva at this plane is Western imperialism’s last frenzied kick at Hinduism. (...) Speaking optimistically *Hindutva* has its geographical limits. It cannot spread easily beyond the boundaries of urban, semi-westernized India. It cannot penetrate southern India where Hinduism is more resilient, where it is more difficult to project on to the Muslim the feared and unacceptable parts of one’s own self. *Hindutva* cannot survive for long even in rural north India where Hinduism is more self-confident and the citizens have not been fully brainwashed by the media to speak only the language of the state. (...) That is why the RSS considers its first task to be moral and physical “improvement” of the Hindus. It does not much like the so-called fallen, compromised Hindus presently available in the back-waters of Mother India. It loves only the Hindus who have been dead for at least one thousand years. If the RSS has its way, it will make every peasant in India wear khaki shorts [paramilitary clothing worn by the RSS]. For its ideal Indian is the brown-skinned version of the colonial police sergeant, reading the Gita instead of the Bible. That is why Nathuram Godse did not kill the modernist and “pseudo-secular” Jawaharlal Nehru but the “arch-reactionary”, “anti-national” sanatani [tradition-

alist] – Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi. After the murder, Nehru could only say that the killer was insane. The modernist Prime Minister found it too painful to confront the truth that Godse was sane, that he knew who was the real enemy of *Hindutva*.¹⁶

Again, in a more recent article, Nandy points to the fact that religious fundamentalist Godse, after his assassination of Gandhi, argued his case within a modernist framework in his defence plea before the court. Therein, Godse ‘repeatedly accuses Gandhi of flouting the canons of secular statecraft.’¹⁷ In the view of the Hindu nationalist assassination group to which Godse belonged, their agitation against partition into India and Pakistan had always been associated with their call for a strong unitary central state under their leadership, whereas Gandhi rejected partition, too, but – even in opposition to Nehru – advocated a more federal structure, with minority rights for Muslims.¹⁸

India’s ancient warrior tradition fits neatly with the modern concept of the national interest. The masculinist warrior acts in accordance with the national interest. When Ashis Nandy describes the prevailing colonial consciousness in post-colonial societies as relating to notions of the warrior caste,

16 Nandy, Ashis, ‘Hinduism Versus Hindutva: The Inevitability of a Confrontation’, *Times of India*, 18 February 1991.

17 Nandy, Ashis, ‘Unclaimed Baggage’, *The Little Magazine*, Vol. III, No. 2: *In bad faith*, Delhi, 2002, p. 1.

18 See Rudolph, Lloyd I., ‘The Road Not Taken: The Modernist Roots of Partition’, in Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Hoeber Rudolph, Susanne, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Chicago University Press, Chicago/London, 2006, pp. 60–91.

the *kshatriya*, we likewise think of the sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), who identified the *Arthashastra* (a treatise on statesmanship) of Kautilya from 300 BC as ‘naked Machiavellism’.¹⁹ According to Weber, ‘war per se’ has to be the systematic political task of a *kshatriya*. Thus, the *kshatriya* Nathuram Godse declared in his defence plea: ‘I never understood why violent resistance against aggression should be unjust. I believe it to be a religious duty to confront a violent enemy with violence and, if possible, beat him.’²⁰

It is the lost golden age that the anti-colonial warrior wanted to reawaken from the reservoir of indigenous myth. He wanted to modernise it in order finally to be able to cope with the Western warrior – for example, his superior arms technology, the discipline and organisational framework of the British nation-state (nowadays the United States) – as an equal. Today, India’s status as a nuclear state restores within the BJP and RSS warrior mind the patriarchal honour that it seemingly missed for so long – and the warrior will never know how trapped he remains thereby within colonial consciousness.

Gandhi, in contrast, activated – according to Nandy’s interpretation – something different in Indian tradition: an effeminate, androgynous tradition, especially for men; the tradition of *ahimsa*, non-violence or nonviolent resistance; and the religious tradition of tolerance that Gandhi extended even to atheists. All of these were combined with

the critical, alternative, heretical and marginalised currents of the West in order to create an alternative universalism of non-colonised minds with a higher ethics than that of the colonial masters and their *kshatriya* counter-players. Colonial masters and their warrior counter-players wanted and want to ‘educate’ their colonial and post-colonial subjects to be better warriors and state bureaucrats. Nandy says that the Intimate Enemy, the colonial mind, is vanquished insofar as there is nothing more to educate, insofar as colonialism loses its educational mission or educational ideology when the higher ethics of the colonised replaces it. In colonial India, this kind of higher ethics was represented by Gandhi and the nonviolent mass resistance of the colonised. To achieve this, the critical, anarchist, effeminate and hybrid traditions of India occur sometimes in the shape of an intellectual activist like Gandhi, but more often in an ‘unconscious-conscious’ manner, as Nandy puts it, because traditional streams or even real indigenous communities in India, like the so-called *adivasis*, have no conscious grasp or conception of the West, nor of a construction like the Indian Nation and its corresponding ideologies. Likewise popular forms of hybrid Hinduism have no conscious conception of what Hinduism is – Hinduism was never formulated as a conscious notion by the hybrid, anarchic streams of popular Hinduism, but more by the upper-caste Brahmanism of modern 19th-century reform Hinduism or 20th-century *Hindutva*. In turn, therefore, Nandy calls these hybrid and non-uppercast popular traditions ‘non-colonised’. These traditions, according to Nandy, contained the non-nationalistic heritage of Gandhi, which, because of his injections of and alliances with Western currents criti-

19 See Assmann, Jan, in his *Einführung* to Conrad, Dieter, *Gandhi und der Begriff des Politischen: Staat, Religion und Gewalt*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 2006, p. 14.

20 Nathuram Godse, cited after Wikipedia, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathuram_Godse, translated by Lou Marin.

cal of industrial society, state politics and modernisation, never remained within the frameworks of provincial identity politics or post-modern relativism.

Ashrams as a basis of androgynous anti-colonialism

Those who compare photographs, documentaries²¹ and other films²² about Gandhi's gatherings and speeches with those showing any other influential personality in anti-colonial movements will be immediately struck by a phenomenon that separates Gandhi from his *kshatriya* counter-players. Gandhi does not inspect the troops, presenting salutations, and no parades are going past. Gandhi did not wear a uniform but a loin-cloth. Usually, his assemblies were prayer meetings, which took place not in Hindu temples but under the open sky. Passages were read from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian and Buddhist texts; only after that did he make a speech on political issues.²³ Habitually, on these occasions, Gandhi sat on the floor or a slightly raised platform, and other participants and people listening also sat rather than stood. Most striking in all pictures of these gatherings is the huge numbers of women who are participating, either surrounding Gandhi directly or forming the majority of the listeners. Such a gathering has been depicted especially sensitively by lesbian Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta in the final sequences

of her film *Water* (2005). The film deals with child marriage and widow discrimination within the setting of the historical widow communes in Benares in the 1930s. Only the crucial part of Gandhi's speech is shown in the film: his reversal of the phrase 'God is Truth' into 'Truth is God'. With this reversal, the widow protagonists in the film are given a legitimisation for breaking free of their destiny and having the courage to remarry despite the prohibitions of religious orthodoxy.

The symbolism of a cotton loin-cloth has many facets pointing to the reasons why Gandhi could establish such a direct, charismatic relationship with vast sections of India's population, which has never been rivalled by any person or political movement before or after him. This relationship prepared the ground for the big mass movements of 1920-22, 1930 and 1942, taking shape within a broad majority in all parts of the country, whereas the history of post-colonial social movements in India has always remained a history of regional, even regionalist movements.

The clothing symbolism of Gandhi refers to his programme of boycotting imported foreign cloth and of the people producing clothing on their own instead, from the growing of the raw material, cotton, to the production of the final product. Given the massive under-employment and the lack of handicraft in the countryside – people had literally nothing to do for approximately six months of the year – Gandhi wanted to motivate the rural population to re-establish their subsistence capabilities by learning to spin on the spinning wheel. Despite considerable efforts, the home-spun cloth-

21 See Jhaveri, Vithalbhai, *Mahatma: Life of Mahatma Gandhi 1869-1948*, Gandhi Films Foundation, Bombay, 1968.

22 See even the award-winning Hollywood film, *Gandhi*, by Richard Attenborough, 1983.

23 See Nanda, B. R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, pp. 74-75.

ing – *khadi* – that wasn't immediately used for subsistence in the villages, and was put on the market, was never able to compete with imported products and remained too expensive for poor Indians without spinning skills. Instead of wearing the less expensive imported cloth, Gandhi, through the symbolism of his loincloth appealed to the masses to go on wearing only home-spun cloth. The message was: even though home-spun cloth is too expensive at the moment, or even when the poor cannot yet produce their own *khadi*, people should wear the piece of home-spun cloth they can afford with dignity.

But that is only one aspect of the clothing symbolism.²⁴ Through his clothing phenomenology, Gandhi was perceived by ordinary people within the majority Hindu population as living the life of an ancient *sannyasi* – a saint or searcher after God – which was deeply rooted in religious tradition. Traditionally, a Hindu saint could lead a life of ascetic renunciation through yoga and meditation in the last of the four phases of his life. For him to be respected as a role model, Gandhi's vow to lead a life of chastity, *brahmacharya*, was crucial. Although he drew a surprisingly large number of his ideas about self-restraint and chastity from European traditions of vegetarianism, public health, naturopathy and hydrotherapy – quoting, for example, the French proponent of chastity, Paul Bureau (1865–1923), or the naturopath, Adolf Just (1859–1936)²⁵ –

the concept of *brahmacharya* is deeply rooted in Indian ascetic tradition. That is why simple rural people perceived Gandhi to be a *brahmachari* in a broader sense, in that he renounced every personal benefit deriving from his actions or movements. If Gandhi was perceived to be worthy of respect as an ascetic, the Indian masses could believe him that he was concerned only with their welfare and not pursuing some hidden, personal objective or agenda. But Gandhi remained, in contrast to the ancient Indian tradition, a politically active ascetic, a *karmayogi*, a practitioner of the yoga of action instead of meditation, in spite of meditative elements incorporated in his prayer meetings and ashram life.

For Gandhi, the transmission of cultural symbolism by clothing was crucial, because it helped him to carry out or at least initiate internal reforms within Indian family life (abolition of child marriage, recognition of the human dignity of widows) and caste structure (abolition of untouchability). The *sannyasi* is not bound, according to tradition, to the duties of family or caste life; he transcends them and is even able and legitimised to inject a new meaning into them. As a widely respected *sannyasi*, Gandhi could challenge caste structure on a basis that enabled him to keep contact with caste society. For a long time, Gandhi's idea was therefore to change the four main castes (priest, warrior, merchant, handicraft worker) from a vertical hierarchical ranking order into a horizontal egalitarian order of equally valued professional groups. From his point of view, this was the original sense of the caste system within Hinduism. Later on, the historical development of Hinduism took, according to Gandhi's understanding, a different turn,

24 On issues to do with clothing see Markovits, Claude, *Gandhi*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2000, pp. 51–56, and Tarlo, E., *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, Hurst & Co., London, 1996.

25 See Alter, Joseph S., *Gandhi's Body. Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2000, pp. 8, 14.

leading to a degeneration and hierarchisation of the caste system. From 1935 on, however, Gandhi changed his mind and assumed that the degeneration of the caste system was too far advanced to be still capable of reform or recovery. From then on, he appealed to all Hindus that they should voluntarily declare and consider themselves to be *shudras*, the lowest caste of craftsmen and workers, or likewise to become *harijans* in order to eradicate untouchability.²⁶

In his book *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy differentiates between the mentality of the *satyagrahi* – the nonviolent resister with his new, effeminate courage – and the kind of disguised and muddling-through mentality of the popular masses within existential situations of crisis in their lives. The latter, Nandy perceives to be a strategy of survival embedded in Hindu culture (he contrasts this mentality with the tradition of pride in suicide found in the ancient Aztec priestly culture in Latin America). This separation of roles and the different, yet converging mentalities Nandy mentions correspond to the separation of the *satyagrahis* living in Gandhi's communes, the ashrams, and the popular masses participating in mass campaigns. The militants of direct nonviolent action within the ashrams have to face the risk of death as a possible consequence of their direct action, where they are exposed to the forces of repression of the colonial adversary. In contrast, the masses, however indispensable for effective economic campaigning like the Salt March and the cloth boycott, were participating in mass movements that involved only minor risks for

the individual. It was the creative tension of both components that gave the anti-colonial resistance its unique economic, political and cultural effectiveness.

The tasks Gandhi wanted to address within the communal life of his ashrams were immense. The ashrams were meant to be a small but living example of the visionary values that the independence movement should disperse all over India. Concerning the reform of the caste system, for example, this meant that all ashram inmates were to shed their inherited prejudices, transferred from generation to generation, including sophisticated nuances of discrimination among different castes. This programme of inner reform was – incidentally – carried out in a way that showed Gandhi's complete independence from bourgeois financial backing. Already, 'in South Africa, Gandhi's associates belonged to all classes and communities. To the first ashram at Ahmedabad, which he founded after his return to India in 1915, he welcomed an untouchable family; this action outraged the rich merchants of Ahmedabad, who were contributing to the upkeep of the ashram. Several associates deserted him in protest. Starved of funds, and with the few inmates at the ashram who still stood by him, Gandhi thought of moving into the slums of Ahmedabad. An anonymous donor, however, rendered this course unnecessary.'²⁷

Although there were structures for gatherings, collective decision-making and dis-

²⁶ See Nanda, B. R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, p. 26.

²⁷ See Nanda, B. R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, p. 19. The saviour turned out to be Ambalal Sarabhai, a rich textile trader from Ahmedabad. Some time later, however, he decided otherwise and stopped his financial support of the ashrams; see Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Hoeber Rudolph, Susanne, *Postmodern Gandhi*, see note 18, pp. 169–70.

cussions within the ashrams, Gandhi was in fact something like an informal leader who determined the direction of internal reform or which long-established customs needed to be opposed. His practice, sometimes disciplinary, but always based on his own standards of morality – for example accompanied by short periods of fasting, in order to urge other associates to rethink their behaviour, thus avoiding physical punishment regimes within the ashram – took into account that the inmates, especially early on, were often illiterate. The ideal vision of life aspired to in the ashrams was far away from the known living realities of the inmates, who were usually attracted only by one aspect of Gandhi's programme. That is why the communards saw themselves first and foremost as learners. To illustrate this: at Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi's second ashram in South Africa, founded in 1910, the inmates were to some extent composed of non-believers as well as believers from all faiths. There were associates from Jewish²⁸, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, non-conformist Protestant and Zoroastrian (Parsi) backgrounds. With the exception of some intellectuals from different countries, the Hindus of the Indian communities in South Africa came from either an illiterate milieu or traditional

caste families. They brought with them into the ashram their habitual practices, according to which, for example, higher castes didn't need to wash their own dishes, or some castes couldn't dine with some other castes, for reasons of purity. Gandhi overcame these numerous problems as follows: 'There was to be one single kitchen, and all were to dine in a single row. Everyone was to see to the cleaning of his own dish (...). The common pots were to be cleaned by different parties in turn.'²⁹

Thus, the ashrams became a vast field of experiment of inner reform of life and outer nonviolent resistance. It was a widened basic-democratic public sphere. The ashrams were 'a human laboratory to which Gandhi admitted scholars, social workers, budding politicians, young radicals, and some cranks. Sometimes he took in even atheists, bigots, former political terrorists, and men and women who did not seem quite sane. Questioned why he wasted his time on these people, Gandhi replied, "Mine is a mad house, and I am the maddest of the lot. But those that cannot see the good in these mad people should have their eyes examined."³⁰

Out of these ashrams came what later would be recognised as the first Indian women's movement, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The surprisingly large participation of women within the nonviolent mass actions of the independence movement, which could even be considered as a decisive factor for the movement, was the reason that Ashis Nandy

²⁸ At the time, there were about 40,000 people of Jewish origin living in South Africa. The influence of Jewish intellectuals on Gandhi in the early phase of the ashrams was enormous. Henry Polak, who came from England, recommended and passed on to Gandhi *Unto This Last* by John Ruskins (1819-1900), (published 1860), which led Gandhi to found the first ashram in Phoenix. Herman Kallenbach, a Jew of German origin, bought the land for Gandhi's second ashram, Tolstoy Farm; see Hoeber Rudolph, Susanne and Rudolph, Lloyd I., 'The Coffee House and the Ashram revisited: How Gandhi Democratized Habermas' Public Sphere', in Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Hoeber Rudolph, Susanne, *Postmodern Gandhi*, see note 18, pp. 141, 164.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³⁰ See Nanda, B. R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, p.149.

spoke in *The Intimate Enemy* of an ‘effeminate’ anti-colonialism and an androgynous formation of their means of struggle.

Already the first big campaign of *satyagraha* that Gandhi led in 1913 in South Africa, after his radicalisation of Tolstoy’s concept of ‘passive resistance’ into the more active concept of ‘adhering to truth’ – drawing more on direct action – was implemented with an extraordinarily high participation of women activists for that period. Eleven women from Tolstoy Farm and 16 activists from the older Phoenix ashram including four women – Gandhi’s wife Kasturba among them – took part. They were protesting against the so-called ‘Black Act’ and other laws designed to stop migration from India, against the ban on Indians crossing the provincial borders of Natal and Transvaal, and against a kind of poll tax imposed on the ‘liberated’ contract workers who wanted to settle in South Africa after fulfilling their five-year bonded-labour contract. But mainly, they were protesting against discriminatory marriage laws, which sanctioned marriages among Christian Indians but declared illegal, in retrospect, marriages among Muslim, Zoroastrian and Hindu Indians. The 16 activists from Phoenix were illegally crossing the border between Natal and Transvaal and were sentenced to three months’ forced labour. Some *satyagrahis* died due to the inhuman conditions in that forced-labour prison. The women of Tolstoy Farm, who were mainly wives of former contract workers, took over leading positions during the Newcastle March, a march that Gandhi conducted together with 5,000 striking coal miners and their families from Natal to Transvaal. In spite of numerous arrests, among them Gandhi, the march couldn’t

be stopped. Leading positions were quickly passed over to other *satyagrahi* ashramites after the seizure of supposed leaders. The march was supported in December 1913 in a strike of 50,000 miners that led to a closing-down of the mines. Thus, the Newcastle March for Gandhi became a model for the legendary Salt March in 1930. The opera *Satyagraha* of Philip Glass, for example, traces back the significance of the Newcastle March in this sense.³¹

Ashis Nandy shows in *The Intimate Enemy* how Gandhi revalorised an alleged deficiency – the effeminateness and sensibility of Indians under colonial rule, in opposition to which Gandhi’s anti-colonial predecessors had wanted to reinstitute the patriarchal *kshatriya* values of heroic courage, discipline, strength and rigour – and transformed it through the massive participation of women in nonviolent mass campaigns into a new force. ‘When Gandhi fasted or his followers allowed themselves to be beaten, he and they demonstrated the courage required for self-control rather than self-assertion. For those who described such behaviour as “unmanly”, Gandhi reformulated the imputation. Such non-violence expressed not the impotence of man but the potency of woman: “Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage?”’³²

31 Hoerber Rudolph, Susanne and Rudolph, Lloyd I., ‘The Coffee House and the Ashram revisited’, see note 27, pp. 160-161; for the opera by Philip Glass, composed in 1980, see *Satyagraha*, Art-Haus München, Aufführung der Staatsoper Stuttgart, 1983.

32 Hoerber Rudolph, Susanne and Rudolph, Lloyd I., ‘Gandhi and the New Courage’, in Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Hoerber Rudolph, Susanne, *Postmodern Gandhi*, see note 18, pp. 204-205.

Ashis Nandy doesn't ascribe that to a kind of universal biological capacity of suffering in women – a biological attribute – but to specific indigenist cultural traditions in India, which have been ousted by *kshatriya* culture and were now revitalised by Gandhi. According to Nandy, Gandhi actualised those streams in Hindu tradition where women were to be seen as carriers of a fundamental and activating living energy (*shakti*), often described as divine, and thus were very respected persons within some Hinduistic minority groups, such as the *vamachari* sect. This living energy bestowed, according to traditional concepts, a special kind of perseverance, endurance, and alternative form of courage. Nandy concludes that this feminine courage has become part of the traditional concept of androgyny in India as opposed to the masculine warrior-courage – the equivalent of masculine failure, then, isn't cowardice, and certainly not female cowardice.

If Gandhi sometimes talks about the capacity of women to bear more self-sacrifice or suffering than men, the reader should be cautious about looking directly to Western interpretations of these notions. Gandhi doesn't draw on Western cultural traditions, according to Nandy, but on Indian tradition based on this fundamental living energy. The term 'suffering', here, is devoid of the Christian notion of culpability and sin – associated with women – and describes a Hindu concept of suffering without guilt and corresponding feelings.

Ashis Nandy wrote *The Intimate Enemy* in 1983, which was long before Judith Butler's (born 1956) post-feminist theories of the 'deconstruction' of biological *sex* into so-

cial gender and alleged 'female' values as mere cultural attributions and results of re-iterative performances were beginning to dominate discussions. In his book, Nandy alternates the English terms femininity, womanhood, womanliness or masculinity, manhood, manliness – maybe to avoid fixed definitions of these terms. I don't know how Nandy would use these terms today. However, what seems certain to me is that his concept of androgyny, drawn from Indian traditions, would remain intact as the crucial basis of the first, anti-colonial women's movement in India, from the 1920s to the 1940s. Furthermore, his main concern isn't a special perception of women, but a reintroduction of androgynous values and behaviour patterns in men, especially within their psychological and cultural settings. This seems to be of universal importance nowadays, in a world where masculine habits correspond to external politics in a warrior culture of new imperial war missions like those in Afghanistan or Iraq. After all, Nandy aims with his androgynous anti-colonialism at nothing less than a universal rehabilitation of the 'softer side of human nature' in the public sphere.

Among contemporary European and US-American feminist activists and thought there is a temptation to criticise this effeminate and androgynous anti-colonialism from the later viewpoint of post-1968 feminism. Here, cultural androgyny is reduced to a biologist pattern of androgynous values, and androgyny as a whole is perceived to be the opposite of feminist autonomy. Such a critique I would consider not only counter-productive and non-contemporaneous, but also arrogant – at the least – if not in it-

self bound up with the colonial framework of consciousness. Moreover, this critique tends to diminish the possible insights into the causes of mass participation by women within Gandhi's campaigns for Indian independence. The successes and achievements of this first Indian women's movement shaping the cultural habits of the independence movement, as well as the soft-aggressive behaviour of male activists and nonviolent revolutionaries within their ranks, would be turned into a cultural view of a movement with a lack of deconstructivist capacity and women's autonomy. The specific anti-colonial strength of the movement would turn out to be a blemish.

European feminist critiques are sometimes inappropriately harsh as they are influenced by European standards and often made in ignorance of specific Indian conditions. Gandhi's avowal, that 'he belonged to all and to no one in particular, like a mother in a joint family',³³ is in fact related to the cultural background of the Indian joint family, where a household could easily exceed 20 individuals, and where a mother has a different role and function from that of the mother in a conventional European nuclear family. Gandhi's assertion, that he sees himself to be 'half man and half woman'³⁴ corresponds with Nandy's interpretation of Gandhi and, for example, contrasts with the patriarchal, militaristic and purely masculine behaviour of Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), his Bengal rival on the strategy of resistance at the end of the 1930s. Bose was one of the exemplary 'counter-players'

in Nandy's sense, who advocated counter-violence and wasn't even aware, when he collaborated with the *kshatriya* culture of the German Nazis or Japan during World War II, how deeply affected he remained by colonial consciousness.

In the same sense, European feminist criticism of Gandhi's moral urge to restrict sexual intercourse within his ashrams to married couples tends to overlook the fact that these ashrams in South Africa as well as in India were established within an existing Hindu culture of child marriage, which prevailed during the whole of the 19th and into the early 20th century. The children, who were all girls, were married as early as the age of six or seven years, and certainly by 14 or 15 – and that was the norm, with very few exceptions. When the husband died, the young widows were discriminated against or even forced to climb the funeral pyre of their dead husbands. Chastity – *brahmacharya* – within Gandhi's ashrams had the liberating practical effect on young female inmates of enabling them to grow up without these patriarchal cultural patterns, to develop their individual interests and live self-determined lives, without being long married by the age of 18 and already responsible for at least four or five children. Those who want to comprehend Gandhi and Ashis Nandy's interpretation of Gandhi's anti-colonialism need to know something of the indigenous background of Indian culture in history, as is shown very sensitively, for example, in Deepa Mehta's film *Water*.³⁵

33 Gandhi, M. K., cited by Nanda, B.R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, p. 150.

34 Gandhi, M. K., cited by Nanda, B.R., *Gandhi and his Critics*, see note 4, p. 16.

35 This film (2005) by the lesbian feminist Indian filmmaker is a comprehensive treatment of the topics of child marriage and discrimination against women.