

Dialogue on Violence
An Interview with Dr. AshisNandy
AnupDhar

This conversation with AshisNandy began on 18thDecember, 2012. Or maybe it began when I first laid my hands on the book named 'At the Edge of Psychology' (Nandy, 1980) at the National Library in Kolkata and started reading it. I am still reading that book; reading the story of 'The Cultural Psychology of Indian Politics'. Reading the marginal story about marginality within the purview of psychology. Reading the story of marginal praxis and the/an imagining of psychology: GirindrasekharBasu is the sheet anchor of this tale. Reading the story of obliviatio(n) of (Indian) Psychology in the womb of colonialism, and its recovery. Originally, we wanted to carry forward the discussion with reference to the text 'The savage Freud: The first non-western psychoanalyst and the politics of secret selves in colonial India' (Nandy, 1995). But more tremulous events shadowed our discussion. The exchange did not start with 'Savage Freud' GirindrasekharBasu in focus. It started in the context of 'Delhi's Shame 16.12.2012' instead. Perhaps it was better this way. The way in which the praxis of psychology or psychoanalysis looks away from society-culture-politics in general is shaken to some extent at least.

AD: I wished to start today's discussion with the story of 'Savage Freud' GirindrasekharBasu, his work-word-thought, and the multitude of secret selves that were shaping up in the womb of colonialism. I formulated the questions in accordance. But the incident of Sunday night is haunting me, making me think¹. I wonder why the discussion can't start from this incident, from this present time. You had once said that we need is a psycho-analysis of culture and not a psychological journal/inventory of culture. What will be the psychoanalysis of this culture, a culture of violence?

AN: Today, we won't adopt the course of Girindrasekhar. We would rather opt for the psychoanalysis of this culture of violence. It is admirable that we don't have a prelisted questionnaire to begin with, because even to me, everything isn't clear from the onset. The ideas acquire shape as we talk and work our way out, work our way through. Gradually, a formulation evolves; it takes time. The joy of talking to you lies in the fact that you never come fully prepared; don't come with a list of questions. I have seen that those who come from foreign countries come completely prepared. They want specific answers for each question. The answers are bound to be somewhat conventional because of that - very much like answering in an examination. This is perhaps because they have already thought about the subject; they consider themselves as having some expertise in the area. The discussion remains generic then, routine. ... If the discussion, the question, doesn't move us at all, then the formulations become conventional. As I talk with you I have a feeling that I am also *thinking through* this dialogue. As a result there will be many

¹ On 16th December, 2012, a 23 year old woman was gang-raped by 6 men in a moving bus around 10 pm IST. She was traveling with a male companion, who was severely injured, as the bus moved in the Munirka district of South Delhi. She died on 29thDecember, 2012. This event garnered mass media coverage and multiple protests regarding the state of safety and protection of women in India.

rudimentary and unclear notions in the discussion. Those things will be there, are bound to be there, and there is no problem with that. ... The question that you have raised - about violence and its nature - let us now arrive at those.

A gentleman called me and inquired about my opinion on this incident ... this instance of a girl being thoroughly roughed up by six men. Not only that, they threw her away from the bus. Not just that, together they even raped her ... in the bus ... in a moving bus ... the bus meandering through the streets of this very city ... That girl is in the hospital now ... on her death bed ... one cannot categorize this type of violence as general violence. As if, such violence is *beyond* our familiar cultural domain; as if, this is the story of another world, of an *unknown* world.

A few days back primary school kids were gunned down in America. The killer is aged twenty; he first killed his mother at home. His mother liked to buy guns and rifles. He took a firearm from her collection and killed twenty seven kids. Then, when the police approached him, he killed himself.

AD: *What is the nature of this violence?*

AN: We can perhaps call it '*anomic violence*' in English. The possibility of such violence is lesser within settled communities where the collectives are intimately bonded, where there is a kind of cultural history or cultural perspective to the collectives and relations. In those communities, someone might kill another out of anger; familial feuds might exist. Violence and counter-violence both might exist. But such ... 'inhuman', I must say ... the possibility of such inhuman violence is less. I think it was George Orwell who mentioned this type of violence for the first time; he is a writer, not a psychologist, and hence a psychological sensibility is not expected to be obvious in his works. In context of this kind of violence he said - this is 'the decline of English murder'. 'American murder' has replaced 'English murder' (Orwell, 2009/1946). Such violence is, as if, without a cause ... almost *causeless* ... violence for the sake of violence. The scope of such violence is increasing in society. There isn't a doubt about the fact that the scope of such violence is more within a society which is individualistic, where the individual or 'individuality' is located, as if, *within* the individual, in itself, and not without. That is to say, you or I - our sense of self comes from our society; a sense that our relationships have bestowed upon us ...

AD: *That our past has given us ...*

AN: Yes, those are *embedded within* us. That is to say, when we say 'I', my 'I' is not exclusively mine. My 'I' includes Calcutta, my relatives, those connections, the stories of those who were in the world I envisaged; those who died among them, like my parents, also have a place in this 'I'. This 'I' is not just me. This 'I' is somewhat larger than me. The 'I' within you is somewhat larger than you. And when we talk with a specific cultural context ... you may call it Bengali culture ... there will be a special tune to our conversation because of this cultural perspective. The tune will change when we talk to someone else.

AD: *Which will be de-tuned in an individualistic society ...*

AN: Yes, it becomes de-tuned. The tune of all conversations, of maximum exchange, is the same. And in that perspective of a social world, of one kind of social world ...

AD: *Or communication...*

AN: ... Scope is less. A small family - father, mother, and child - the father is not even mentioned in this incident in America. Whether the man had any friend, what was the nature of their friendship in case he had one, cannot be determined. Why did the man kill in the first place, and then why he committed suicide, is not clear. However hard you try, you cannot fathom this easily. Even if you organize a seminar of world famous psychologists, I suspect, they won't be able to figure this out.

AD: *Is this difficulty because the analyses of mind and societal structure need to be bridged? Is it because of the dearth of knowledge regarding psycho-social analysis?*

AN: Yes, in all probability this is the reason. It's not possible all the more because his past story is lost forever with his death. In case he went to some psychoanalyst, you might gather some clue from the case history documented there. Here, in these situations, the psychoanalyst has to work like a detective.

AD: *Has this kind of violence, what you called 'anomic violence', increased in recent times?*

AN: Yes, it is increasing; other or older types of violence are decreasing. No one has been able to come up with a good grammar of this new *brand* of violence. Though, I found it first mentioned in Rabindranath's '*Parasya*' (Persia) (Tagore, 2003/1932). Rabindranath, while travelling across Afghanistan, wondered about the one who is bombing from air in the Afghan War. He cannot see what is happening to the people down below. He cannot know whether they are scared, injured, hurt, or whether they are sobbing. All that he is equipped with are figures, numbers, and statistics. So many bombs dropped, so many people killed. This *abstracted violence*, very similar to what happened in the concentration camps where humans were not considered to be humans - as if it was an industrial belt, a factory of death - this violence is new. This new kind of violence is emerging in our society in recent times. There is a significant difference between Nazi violence and other genocides. Everything isn't the same. You can see this distinction in violence in the history of India. Other than the riot during the Partition and a few other riots ... the Gujarat Riot in 2002 for example ... and ... no, perhaps that is the only one...

AD: *Probably that is the only one ...*

AN: Where you find the riot spreading to the village on a wider scale - what Mahmood Mamdani calls 'popular genocide' (Mamdani, 2002) - is relatively less in our country, I think.

AD: *Does the work on Partition violence show that popular genocide is not so common in our land, in India?*

AN: Yes, in our work on partition we have found that approximately forty percent of the people say that they managed to escape and save their lives with the help of Muslims of their locality. Some of them came to know from others that their Muslim neighbors protected them. I hypothesize that if you compare this with any Western or European genocide you will see that this figure has fallen to one, two, or five, there ...

AD: *Why is the figure forty here? How will you explain this?*

AN: One explanation can be that till then, perhaps even now, the communities have not disintegrated completely in our country ... killing people of one's own village is rare here maybe. Usually it is found that a group of people from a different village comes to kill and loot. This is the nature of incidents that took place during the Partition. This is relatively less in East Bengal, I think. The village people in East Bengal have occasionally participated in violence ...

AD: *Because ...?*

AN: Because the class system was dominant in East Bengal. The class division is clearly visible there. It seems that it is slightly less visible in Punjab. Maybe the lifestyle of the three communities prevalent in Punjab was somehow linked...

AD: *Connected ...*

AN: Yes, intertwined. Hence, this sort of violence is less there. However, this detour has taken us away from Rabindranath Tagore. After Rabindranath, it was Hannah Arendt who repeated the same thing with great emphasis in her writing 'Eichmann in Jerusalem' (Arendt, 1994). Robert Lifton also shows in his book 'The Nazi Doctors' (Lifton, 2000) that the legitimacy of Nazi violence stems from the detached pursuit of science. It seems clear that the violence doesn't stem from superstition, prejudice, or stereotype. It comes from *scientificity*. They opt for violence in the name of biology, eugenics, and scientific rationality of the nineteenth century. The theory of Jews being sub-human species itself stems from evolutionary biology.

AD: *Is it the distance of scientific neutrality, or the scientific neutrality of distance ...?*

AN: Both, perhaps. This violence is a part of, or becomes a part of, scientific rationality. Scientific analysis is neutral and rigid. Human sentiments and other habitual responses of the everyday don't have a place in science. This rationality or analysis seems so rigid that it is unaffected by life and death. When you open up a guinea pig or a dog in a laboratory for an experiment, whether it suffers or experiences pain is irrelevant. This type of violence has increased in India as well. If anybody writes the history of riots in India - perhaps psychologists should be the ones to write such histories - then it will be revealed that one starts a riot when there is a political plot behind it. This is what I have come to comprehend. The way you now see the riot is similar to how a scientist or chartered accountant would see it - *how much is the benefit in starting a riot? Will the riot put the Chief Minister in an awkward position? To what extent will this riot be effective when it comes to electoral equations? Will it be beyond extremes? Exceeding the limit will put me in danger. I myself will be discredited. What will be my political future? To what extent should the riot run? To what extent should it be allowed?* And so on. There are riot experts in various political parties. They can start a riot if asked for. Tehelka magazine had done large scale coverage of the Godhra riots of 2002 in 2007. In that coverage, they showed how deeply political leaders, parties, and the police were implicated in the violence of the riots. When they claimed that they did not want 'anybody to get hurt', the rioters responded that they cannot guarantee that; that some people might get hurt.

AD: *As in, collateral damage?*

AN: Yes, exactly like collateral damage. This type of violence, violence conforming to scientific rationality, planned violence - you can call it the violence of the chartered accountant - is, as if, a part of our *modernity*. This is increasing in India, even though we are yet to completely master the game of modernity. Accomplishing it doesn't guarantee a decrease in this violence, perhaps it guarantees an increase. I think it is increasing in cities and among middle-class families.

AD:*In your opinion, will it increase in the future?*

AN: Yes, it will and I am absolutely sure about that. The work of a psychologist, now, is to analyze this propagation of violence. Because only then will we be able to understand how such violence can be done away with. Is there a way to deal with such violence in the first place? If it is at all possible, then where? Or is there no such way? ...

AD:*What, according to you, can be a way of prevention?*

AN: I think there is but one way to prevention ... I can think of only one. If the old communal complexes have collapsed altogether, then to recover them partially would be one preventive act; and if that is not possible, one may search for new complexes to replace the older ones.

AD:*How will you distinguish between old and modern complexes? Modernity is not just about individualism. There is concept of collectivity in modernity as well.*

AN: You are right. The complexes that developed in the last two centuries ... take nationalism for instance ...

AD:*It is becoming impossible to keep faith in it...*

AN: No, one cannot trust it ...

AD:*Because they too are becoming core texts of violence, I feel.*

AN: Rabindranath Tagore was the first one to observe this ...

AD:*You have also raised the issue of the illegitimacy of nationalism (Nandy, 1994).*

AN: Yes. Like Rabindranath I will invoke the word 'nationalism' phonetically in Bengali. There is no term in English that corresponds to it, because patriotism and sense of pride for the land is not nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore has used almost ten to twelve words like these in his writing. But whenever the concept of nation was invoked he wrote 'nation' phonetically in Bengali script since it is not connected to patriotism. Everyone is patriotic to some extent. Even cats and dogs are patriotic. A person might change one's home but a cat doesn't. Even a bird has sense of land and time. Patriotism and nationalism are not the same. This distinction is vital. Nationalism will not serve our purpose. Hannah Arendt has called nationalism 'pseudo-solidarity'. We need to think, then, about the essence of *true* solidarity. We may question how it might be accommodated within our cultural framework because the brand of education imparted by our universities has no scope for this kind of thinking. Our education is the education of the information processing system. The collecting, harnessing and utilizing of information are primary. This is similar to the system of the

applied disciplines. It has no relation with true knowledge, vision, or wisdom. In my understanding, the project of a psychologist is to analyze these domains, these very processes.

AD:*And the construction of a perspective for violence through this is also a part of the same project?*

AN: Yes, merely stating that violence is bad and non-violence is good will not suffice. How can the spreading of violence be reduced, how can violence be harnessed, and how can the scope of non-violence be furthered has to be thought-through. Gandhi was capable of this. He worked with a phenomenal intuition and was able to spin the basis for non-violence in society. He used to say that the *Pathan* is the foremost '*satyagrahi*' in India's struggle for independence. I agree with this belief because the British fought against the *Pathans* in four Afghan wars. The British carried resentments towards the *Pathans*. They did not believe that the *Pathans* were non-violent. Hence, the British tried to control them with brute force in the beginning. The British police tortured them brutally. But the *Pathans* did not even reciprocate with violence once. When they believed in non-violence, they put their entire faith into that belief. Today, when they believe in Taliban violence they do that too with all their heart. Actually, both potentials are there in man – violence and non-violence both exist. Which of the two potentials is more creative is to be sought. Therein lies the challenge.

AD:*You have spoken about the psychoanalysis of violence, which is a type of cultural analysis at the same time. ... But, psychoanalysis itself has a violence of its own. The violence of quantification is present in the scheme/format of the violence of dominating/hegemonizing psychology, and there is the violence of reducing violence to utilitarianism as well. The way one looks and understands the non-western world and its culture in particular; primarily seeing it as regressed or primitive. Keeping in mind the violence of psychology or psychoanalysis, which form of psychoanalysis should we approach? In other words, what sort of psychoanalysis or psychology should we move towards? ... In 'savage Freud' (Nandy, 1995) you have mentioned about two Freuds ...²*

AN: We need both the Freuds. Critical psychology is necessary. Because there are people in society whom you ought to criticize, you must protest against their activity. It is not enough to bring them to the clinic, to interview and analyze them in order to find out and trace the root of their specific problems. You *have* to take a position, a stand. On the contrary, the other Freud who is clinical psychology or psychoanalysis is also necessary. That empathy cultivated by clinical psychology or psychoanalysis is needed in order to understand violence as well. And unless we enter the human mind, the mental history with an approach based on empathy, psychoanalysis cannot begin.

AD:*Even in order to understand the one we are opposing we need some kind of empathy.*

AN: That's right. But it is also true that when you empathize, it takes the shine off your protest. However, you cannot take him as non-human or sub-human ...

AD: *Then, again it becomes some sort of laboratory formulation ...*

² 'The basic contradiction in Freud, therefore, was between the inner logic of clinical work which demanded a set of categories that came from myths, fantasies, and self-analysis, and a philosophy of science which demanded a different language of self-expression' (Nandy, 2004, p. 386).

AN: Can be a laboratory or a slaughter house...

AD: *That is an intensely critical social analysis on one hand and an empathetic analysis of the individual on the other. An analysis which is empathetic towards the language, history, and experience of the individual. An analysis that listens with the heart.*

AN: Yes, we have to work within this *binary* tension. It cannot be avoided. People will urge to quickly take a position. But psychology or psychoanalysis will forever maintain this dynamic, this tension. ... This reminds me of Bruno Betelheim's (who is himself a psychoanalyst) famous protest in the context of Robert Lifton's work. Bruno Betelheim, with respect to 'The Nazi Doctors' (Lifton, 2000), was of the opinion that: an effort of such an extent to understand the Nazi forces will blur your critical lens, stealing the edge off your judgment (Freyhofer, 2004). Betelheim says that this must not be done because it's immoral. Perhaps he has secretly or indirectly even held the opinion that bearer and carrier of such atrocities should not be considered human beings. Betelheim's position is close to that of the Nazis who used to assert 'the right to terminate lives which are not worthy of life'.

AD: *Yes, awkwardly close. Such a position is slightly scary.*

AN: Yes, close enough. Therefore, this critical perspective needs to be scrutinized. We also need to think about the clinical perspective. ... Although, I personally hope to consider Lifton's path seriously.

AD: *That is to say Betelheim and Lifton - clinical and critical perspectives - are not easy to merge. A gap remains.*

AN: Yes, it exists. I have written an article on *Savarkar* recently. The admirers of *Savarkar* will be infuriated on reading it, I imagine. The anti-lobby will be enraged as well; they will think that I am being over sympathetic towards *Savarkar* perhaps. Actually I am trying to understand *Savarkar* as a human being. I think I gave the man the respect that he deserves as a freedom fighter. I have preserved his dignity as a *man*. I have tried to show how much of a de-humanized machine he was with his dignity as a man preserved throughout. He was a propounder of the sort of violence that we were discussing in the beginning. According to his doctrine, if Muslims rape Hindu women, Hindus should do the same to Muslim women. He said this when he was thirty; again he repeated the same thing when he was eighty. He said, "The Hindu should cultivate the Hindu sentiment of revenge seeking and violence, or counter-violence. Absolute non-violence is absolute sin".

AD: *Psychology or psychoanalysis is inclined both ways. On one side, there lies cultural criticism, even a criticism of people's actions. On the other side, there is tolerant, sympathetic cultivation of relationships. Without this cultivation of relationships, without a listening ear or this interest, without a feeling for the psychography of others one will fail to understand a human/individual. Perhaps the discipline will continue with this tension. And perhaps this in-discipline is the beauty of the discipline. Understanding the bearer and carrier of violence on one hand and criticizing the violence itself on the other - both of them will be present in the practice-praxis called psychology or psychoanalysis. Perhaps this practice-praxis will never be monoscopic.*

AN: The acknowledgement of *humanity inherent in mankind* is embedded in the way we understand other individuals. Besides, what is absent in our science should also surface. It is our admittance of being human, of being fragile as a human being, being an ordinary human as a therapist.

AD: *Clinical thinking or clinical sensibility might sprout from this admittance ...*

AN: Yes, not only the acknowledgement of others being human, but also that of the therapist herself being human will foster this ... We have to see how sympathy, fellow feeling, and even passion and the lack of these are at work within ourselves. The credibility of our (clinical) work depends on our depth of realization of relation with our own emotions.

AD: *So, you emphasize two things. The acknowledgement of the human aspect of the 'other', even if the other is a bearer and carrier of violence on one hand, and that of the therapist herself akin to patients or clients on the other side.*

AN: Yes. To elaborate it further, perhaps it will shape up as follows if explained a bit differently - Judgment, analysis, and prognosis can come only from dispassionate, emotionally uninvolved rationality – this is, primarily the framework of natural science. The framework of human science is slightly different. Here, knowledge dawns from the acknowledgement and analysis of feelings, passion, prejudice, and stereotypes - which are active within the therapist, within ourselves ...that is, in this case knowledge comes from our own ... self ...

AD: *Not from self-insulation but from...*

AN: But from self-observation that is self-analysis ...

AD: *Which is the analysis of transference and counter-transference in psychoanalysis?*

AN: I will say that social knowledge will come from analysis of transference and counter-transference.

AD: *You have mentioned this in your essay 'Towards an Alternative Politics of Psychology' (Nandy, 1983).*

AN: Yes, I have written on this. Now, I will say that the authenticity and truth claim of your inferences will increase to the extent to which you heighten your awareness of your own emotions. As your awareness about your own emotions will increase, along with that of others, you will be enriched and become sophisticated in your pursuit of knowledge. ... Perhaps, you won't need this in the natural sciences. But human science is based on this. ... However, the scope of this in life science might be considered ...

AD: *It might be considered because life science is dealing with life worlds; perhaps the organic world reflects back our way of looking, our gaze ...*

AN: Hence, you will see that in ethological studies that have been done so far not much work has been done by anybody on models of physical science.

AD: *You are talking about a bi-directional aspect of psychology or psychoanalysis; about a tension ...*

AN: A tension, a confusion, will continue within you. And you have to work with it for your entire life. Framed alternatively, it might be said that a dialogue is possible between psychoanalysis and some Sufi doctrines. The Sufi philosophers believe that the other is knowable only through union with the other. A form of discourse might be born out of the process of union. Sheer detached analysis won't suffice. The *process* of union might as well be a way and means to knowledge. This idea of union can be incorporated into our discourse. The assimilation has to be figured out, in this sense.

AD: *You say that the Greater India, the Indian culture, is psychologically minded. Two questions arise from this. Firstly, what are the points of convergence and departure of this psychological mindedness (if it exists in the first place) with psychoanalysis? Secondly, the definition or imagining of psychology and psychoanalysis that you are trying to shape through this conversation, will that easily flourish in this psychologically minded culture, in this ambience? Did this psychological mindedness prepare the Indian culture in advance to accommodate the mind related sciences from the West? Was the Indian culture prepared in advance to some extent to accept these mind related sciences? Again, what exactly is this fore-preparation? What are its characteristics and nature?*

AN: It is difficult to answer this. There are many layers and it depends on the context. If you talk about applied psychology ... I can see the shadows of Tantra in it. Or, in Tantra I see some shadows of applied psychology ... I trace this even in Gandhi. We may ask what was happening exactly when various kinds of workers were coming to his *asrama*, and he assigned the job of sweeper to highly educated persons coming from the upper crust of society? ... A distant relative of Uma³, after the completion of an education abroad, came to Gandhi with the intention of serving the land. He was assigned the job of cleaning bathrooms by Gandhi. The gentleman said, "I came to serve the country, to talk with you". He didn't understand why he was being asked to clean bathrooms. Gandhi replied, "All right, I take a walk in the evening, you can join me, we shall talk". After two or three months, Gandhi asked the gentleman, "How is your work getting along?" The gentleman replied, "I need time to get used to this kind of work". Gandhi didn't say a word. After five or six months, Gandhi asked again, "Well, how is your work going?" The gentleman replied, "I have got used to the job but the stench lingers throughout the day". Once again, Gandhi didn't say anything. Five or six more months went by. Once again while taking an evening stroll Gandhi asked, "So how is your work going on?" The gentleman replied, "Now it's all right, I have got completely used to the job, the stench doesn't bother me anymore". Gandhi said, "You have cleaned bathrooms for quite some time. I will ask *Naran-Bhai* to assign you another work".

I believe that this method of Gandhi's is identifiably Tantric. ... I cited this example to illustrate that you need not always be conscious about what you are calling a fore-preparation. We have been brought up in this culture. Its categories will naturally pervade our life. We only need the courage to see them active within ourselves. You have to allow that play *within* you. If you are stiffened by the thought that the Indian categories are pervading your Western perspective – oh! No, this isn't exactly Freudian – or, this is not like existential psychoanalysis - this isn't Marxist - this is getting

³ Uma Nandy is Dr. AshisNandy's wife.

essentialist - then you will be choked. It has to be kept free floating. You may give birth to something entirely new from this *mélange*, but you can't keep your doors shut.

AD: *Particularly, we must not shut the doors to our own culture. We often speak of opening the doors to Western ideas, but tend to forget when we are unknowingly closing the door to our own culture. ... So Tantra is one way, one such door. Can we conceive of any other way out?*

AN: Girindrasekhar Basu - he has adapted from the *vedantas*, *sankhyas*, and *yogas*. It is not that we are the first ones to think this way. But, mostly I think we look for compatibilities. We try to locate the areas where we are *like them*. Hence these efforts fail to inspire new ideas...

AD: *Or perhaps Girindrasekhar's 'A New Theory of Mental Life' (Bose, 1966) ...*

AN: ... Fail to inspire such approaches. For we are not yet willing to admit that our concepts, our categories, are at times much more sensible, much more relevant, much more ...

AD: *Evocative...*

AN: Yes, they might be evocative as well.

AD: *We can see this tendency in Girindrasekhar, particularly in the framework of 'A New Theory of Mental Life' (Bose, 1966).*

AN: Yes, Girindrasekhar had this trait. At least, the effort was there ... in my writing on Girindrasekhar, in that story of '*SarvilakaPundarika*' (Nandy, 2004), there was a hint. That story has some elements to understand Girindrasekhar, as I have understood him, and hints on the perspective from which Girindrasekhar himself makes sense of things. This attempt of *Pundarika's* father, i.e., *Sarvilaka's* attempt to maintain the caste system, this non-existence of space to criticize the caste system in *Pundarika's* world has also been hinted upon in the story. The possibility of a life that pays no heed to the caste system is absent in the story. Psychology or psychoanalysis may become an inhuman Tantra - very much like *Sarvilaka's* superstition that sways beyond questions - is the suggestion in this story. But Girindrasekhar himself did not emphasize on this hint. The full potential of relevant contextualization of the story, in my mind, has not been achieved. That is why I start my text on Girindrasekhar with this story. I wanted to show how it lightens up the life and work of Girindrasekhar himself, or the shadow that it casts. ... Although today's milieu was absent then. The kind of commercial tendency that has pervaded medical practice or psychology, where the patient is looked upon merely as a part of the medical industry was not prevalent in that period. It was not present institutionally in the least.

Now, it's high time to retrospect the importance of science in modern life, how much it should be, whether one can criticize science without being a scientist herself, what does collateral damage mean when it comes to science, who are the victims of this damage and to what extent. ... Currently, one-third of the referral is iatrogenic. That is to say, more people are falling sick because of the application of the methods of medical science. They are visiting the doctor again after falling sick. Manu Kothari has shown through his work that medicines prescribed by doctors for general patients is thrice of what they prescribe for their relatives and loved ones. 8-9 percent women

actually need caesarian section operations. 27 percent women undergo caesarian section in America, 10 percent in the government hospitals of Delhi. The figure is more than 90 percent in any private clinic of South Delhi. This operation has been standardized. The contract between doctors and patients is now a general standard. And the honour of the contract is to be protected with law through the Consumer Protection Act. The lawyer is also ready for it. The lawyer doesn't even charge in America. You have to give the lawyer one third of the indemnity that you receive. ... This is the status of cultivation of science, the status of applied science; and even the case of mental health is no different. Sheer medicinal dependence, where no one is bothered about the root of depression.

AD: *Depression is a symptom. Everyone takes care of the symptoms only with Fluoxitin, Ceratralin, or Amitriptilin. No one is bothered about the root of depression. For example, fever is a symptom. One might have fever for various reasons. From brain tumor to diarrhea, anything can cause fever. We prescribe Paracitamol for the fever. This brings down the temperature. But that doesn't treat the root of illness.*

AN: Mental health, in my opinion, is gradually getting *adaptationist*. The mind related sciences seem to continually make for your coping with the existent, existing world.

AD: *You have called this 'conformist psychology'.*

AN: We obtained a highly disturbing image of a model in the works of Charles Long. Charles Long is a known name in the field of Religious Studies. He showed that the doctors who treated slaves primarily owed their allegiance to the Masters of the slaves. The job of the doctor was to maintain the health of the slaves, to enhance their efficiency of production. What is good or bad for the slaves was never taken into consideration. This brand of medical science pushes our relationship with disease towards a particular direction.

AD: *It tends towards an undesirable direction.*

AN: It is the same with psychology. Today's psychology is not in the least concerned with the well being of the individual.

AD: *It is concerned with productive capacity, with competitive mind frames, concerned with the killer instinct of cricketers.*

AN: Cricket isn't a game anymore, it is a profession.

AD: *I will end the conversation with one question. Your 'look' will be of help to us. If you look back, a course in psychology was introduced in Calcutta University in 1915. Girindrasekhar Basu studied there as a student first, then he taught in the department, and he wrote his PhD thesis 'The Concept of Repression' (Bose, 1921) in the meantime. Later he wrote a new theory of repression, had his exchange of letters with Freud, wrote a re-reading of yogasutra-shankhya and the Bhagwad Gita, the psychoanalytic journal Samiksha and Chitta were getting published - and now again psychology is assuming a specific shape before us mainly under the auspices of NIMHANS - if you see this journey of almost a hundred years from the perspective of our country ...*

AN: It is a difficult task. Firstly, we cannot go back to the past. All history is contemporary history. History is history of the *moment*. One cannot go back even if one wants to. Secondly, there is a difference between the history that we construct and the history and experience that exists in actuality. How do we fill up that difference, that gap? Thirdly, in whichever way we frame history, for me it guides the present. Grounded in the present, I want to speculate why we did or did not do something in the past. In other words, it is always retrospective. How is that past relevant to the present? In what way can that past influence my present? ... I didn't think of the past this way. I am doing it because you are asking me to do so. There was unrest and unease somewhere in my mind; Indian psychology could have advanced to a great extent, for the history of mind related studies in our country dates back to ancient times. Take *sankhya* for an example. Again, the Islam that arrived in India wasn't Wahabi Islam - that Islam had a connection with the *Bhakti* movement, it had a connection with the Indian mentality/psyche, that Islam had a mental connection with Persia - we can gather much mind related experience from that brand of Islam. I have already mentioned Sufism earlier.

AD: *You have mentioned both, Sufism and Tantra.*

AN: Therefore, through the reconstruction of my past, I arrive at seeing the individual - or the other - with an empathic fellow feeling as the basis of a healing system, as well as that of the mind related sciences. As if, I go to my past in order to look for this feeling. I don't know whether this is history according to the criteria and standards of the historians; for history is dependent on archives. We seldom work on archives because what is obtained from the pages of an archive might be suitable for history writing in the disciplinary sense, but it is not so useful in writing the history of subjectivity. We can write the history of the system of slavery from the archives but not the history of slaves themselves. We cannot write the psycho-history of slaves, the history of their experiences. In a public hearing of an Asian women's group, a woman stood up and said that she got a diary of her grandmother's grandmother; she was writing it when the slave system was in full swing - *'I know that my mother was a rape victim, I know that my mother's mother was a rape victim, I have been raped, I know that my daughter will be a rape victim once she grows up, even her daughter will follow the suit, I know what rape is from the core'*. This is an other/Other history. This is no less important than whether thirty lakh people or sixty lakh people died because, to write the history of violence or inhumanity both kinds of histories must be written. I want psychoanalysis to help write the second kind of history in our country. ... In order to understand the nature of violence with which we started our conversation, the violence which is increasing and spreading out, we need this second form of history writing.

Psychoanalysis can play an important role there, in that history writing. ... Capital punishment is losing grounds in Europe because the people of Europe know by this time that crime cannot be reduced with capital punishment. Many a study has revealed this. People of our country do not know this yet, and hence demand for 'kill this man, kill that man'. Why has *Kasab* not been killed yet⁴? Why is *Afzal Guru* still alive⁵? I find this vulgar. It is fearsome to think that the consensus, the

⁴ Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, implicated in the mass killings in Mumbai in 2008, was hanged on 21st November, 2012.

public leaders, and the national parties of such a big and ancient country are pro-capital punishment. Stalin is no more, communism has failed in Russia, and it is no longer shameful to say that Stalin was responsible for mass killing, that there is no connection between the principles of KGB and the Marxian discourse. This is shameful because we cease to be secular and progressive if we do not support Russia. ... Somewhere in our social thinking, in our social discourse there is an acute *lack* of creativity. Strange indeed! Why can't we think for ourselves our own past-present-future even in 2012?

AD: *Is a caste system at work even here?*

AN: Yes, for certain ...

AD: *This includes Marxian hierarchization ...*

AN: Surely. The imperialism of categories that we talk of has been born from within ourselves.

AD: *They only took advantage of this slavery.*

AN: It is us who have taken it for granted that it should be this way. We have taken it for granted that there is something like a universal *absolute* called science. Creativity is impossible in such milieu. It lacks self confidence. You have rightly called it a caste system.

AD: *I think Girindrasekhar possessed this confidence, this creativity - at least partially. That is why he was able to move from psychoanalysis to yogasutra, sankhya, and the Bhagwat Gita with relative ease; that is why he was able to move to the story of red and black ants.*

AN: Perhaps, you need to observe that there is certain stiffness even in this type of creativity. He is far more predictable when he is writing in English. As if we can guess beforehand what he is going to say, how he will say it, and which way he is heading. But Girindrasekhar is much more fluent, much bolder, when he is writing in Bengali. He is transgressing the boundaries of psychoanalysis to say much more in his Bengali writings. As if, the window has opened, and the imagination has been sharpened as a result. His work in Bengali, in my opinion, is intellectualized to far greater extent as compared to the English counterparts. The kind of mind related science that he develops as a result of this is intimately linked with our society and culture.

AD: *As if two different traits are simultaneously active.*

AN: That is why I call the second tendency '*the secret self*' and not the unconscious self. This was present in Freud as well. You have talked about two Freuds. With reference to the second Freud, there seems to be some sort of connection between the secret selves of Freud and Girindrasekhar.

AD: *As if there is a secret connection between the two secret selves.*

⁵ Mohammad Afzal Guru, found guilty by the Indian Court for the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, was hanged on 9thFebruary, 2013.

AN: Exactly. There is a secret connection. This isn't unconscious, it is conscious.

AD: *But secret.*

AN: As if, a secret life which is active in systems of slavery, in imperialism, and in the present state of capitalism. Perhaps this is a pertinent point to wind up today's discussion. Many forms of subjectivities are taking off from today's capitalism. Today's capitalism greatly emphasizes on festivity, or rather a festive tonality; at times in virtual reality or in entertainment otherwise - if you cannot trace it in real life then go to the twenty four hours entertainment channels. In America, it is not surprising to take a day's leave if someone expires. But if you ask for a seven days leave on account of your mother's death everyone will be surprised. They will tell you to 'move on'. This 'move on' angers me. Why should I move on if I don't feel like it? Why can I not work through my mourning? They only understand 'working through the past' with psychiatric aid. They understand 'working through' as a technical psychiatric term ...

AD: *But do not understand the silent proximity with the self.*

AN: They simply do not understand the meaning of the expression '*I am in mourning*'. They don't realize the nature of tears of every individual is unique. One who lost her father in her childhood and doesn't have any sibling will perhaps shed more tears at the demise of her mother; she will feel as if she has lost a part of her life along with her mother.

AD: *The expanse, need, preparation, and depth of bereavement of every individual is different. And it is culturally determined to some extent.*

AN: In contemporary capitalism, this difference is difficult to locate. I came across this story. A lawyer was defending a case in our country. A chit came to him during the trial; 'mother expired' was written on it. He slipped it into his pocket and continued with the proceedings. This story conveys to us an ideal. It teaches us how to move on. Perhaps the lawyer too thinks this to be natural, adaptationist. A holding on to the past, they will say, a craze about the past, is impossible in this advanced or new stage of capitalism - of globalized capitalism or globalized capital. This capitalism will never admit that the past can be a basis of tools for criticism of the present.

AD: *They would not admit this because capitalism, or the present capitalism, will not admit any criticism in the first place.*

AN: When one says that on the basis of the past, the present society is sinking, it is not nostalgia or romanticism for some pristine past. This is a form of disaffection or discontentment with the present. People mostly take the present for granted; adaptation is the only way out.

AD: *Or adjustment ...*

AN: Right, not adaptation, adjustment is a better word.

AD: *As if there is no room for critical engagement with the present. As if there is no room for criticism within the present. We have to keep on complying with the present. ... And now a final question -Where will we place psychology in this context of capitalism, with which we are wrapping up our discussion,*

of the festive self and secret self, discussed earlier in relation to a new 'ism' of violence and in the perspective of collective nexus and muted obliteration of the past? Psychology, in a way, has become the spearhead of this adjustment. In this sense, today's dominating psychology is an intimate ally of global capitalism. On the other side, the individual secretly preserves a part of his self - what you have called 'double ledger' (Nandy, 2000) ... a particular character of psychology (the American character of psychology to be more specific) is shaping up on one side and on the other, the collective complexes are falling apart, the call of the past is getting obscured and man is gradually becoming a 'double ledger'. ...

AN: There is continuity in the existence of a human; there is a past, present, and future. There is a place for past and future in our culture, or perhaps in all cultures. Man is always conversing with the past.

AD: *She is speaking to her self.*

AN: She is also talking *to* the future. Essentially, past and future are modes of the present. We are narrating the present in essence, but in three different modes. The 'double ledger' comes in handy when some of the time axes begin to oppress. This is when it is said that rashness about the past is needless, when it is said that there is official history to speak for the past. As if, if you want to excavate your past, you better lay down on a couch.

AD: *That amounts to saying, 'surrender your past to the institution named history or psychology'.*

AN: Yes, surrender it to institutionalized history. But you are forbidden to engage in candid dialogue with your ancestors, or with nature ... which we find in our *Puranas* ... the conversations of animals, birds, ghosts, spirits, gods, and demons...

AD: *Conversation with the cosmology of spirits ...*

AN: *Bheem* goes to the Netherworld and returns with a wife; one goes to the heaven and returns thereafter, gods and demons are pervading our world, animals and birds talk with us like human beings, *suk-sari* or *byangoma-byangomi* talk like human beings - this is natural, this navigation is without hindrance, there are innumerable cracks in the wall of existence, porous borders between the past and the future...

AD: *And the possibility of innumerable relationships.*

AN: Yes, man and fauna, species inferior and superior to man; some of them are immortals, take *Aswathama* for an instance - *Aswathama* is still alive ... some years back the newspapers reported about *Aswathama* when someone spotted an old saint. Now, he only has a place in literature ... now we cannot assert that this tradition is still being lived out. It has become a fantasy/phantasy. It is no more a living tradition; it is not even a shared tradition.

AD: *We used to think, especially in the context of Marxism, that the future alone is the end and means of becoming man. We used to look down upon our past. The past was unbearable. The future alone*

was desirable. Such was the mode of temporal imagination. ... Today, you have suggested a different route by showing how the past too can be an end and means to utopia.

AN: Bruno Latour has said that, 'the path to all futures lies through our past'. If we are to find a future for ourselves, we too have to detour through the *Puranas*, *Vedas*, and *Vedantas*.

AD: Girindrasekhar too wrote '*Purana-Pravesa*' (Bose, 1934).

AN: It is because there is room for the life of the common man in the *Puranas*.

AD: *There is room for everyday-ness as well.*

AN: Right, there is room for everyday-ness. Our *Puranas* are open. The narratives are not open in Iliad and Odyssey. Many people say that the Muslims do not have the *Puranas*. They have discovered an analogue of the *Puranas* in *Dastangoi* ... It is an Urdu oral tradition of storytelling that dates back to the sixteenth century; a tradition that is transmitted orally. They have discovered many mythical characters in *Dastangoi*. These folktales work as the *Puranas* for Indian Muslims - *Puranas* because it contains the views and lifestyles of ordinary men and their criticism of the modern world ... we will discover our future by seeking recourse in these modalities of the past ...

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