SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS: MODERNITY AND THE LANDSCAPE OF CLANDESTINE AND INCOMMUNICABLE SELVES[1]

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I. The Nation-State

Like many other similarly placed countries in the South, India—perhaps the whole of South Asia—relates to the global political-economic system and the global mass culture of our times mainly through its modern political self. When India resists these global orders, the resistance is articulated and legitimized by this self; when India opens itself up for globalization, that opening up and the zeal that goes with it are mediated through the same self. India's modern self scans, interprets, assesses, and adapts to the demands of the outside world, both as an entity that processes the outside world for the consumption of the Indians and as an entity that processes the Indian experience for the outsiders. The world usually knows India as it has been constructed by the modern Indians in collaboration with specialist Western scholarship on India. Orientalism is frequently a joint "dream work" where the defenses and cultural "armor" of the West is matched by a self-representation and self-engineering of the modernizing non-West.

Because these processes tend to get telescoped into the personalities of the social actors involved, the modern Indian is usually in dialogue with himself or herself when seemingly in dialogue with the rest of the world. From social and religious reformer Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), popularly known as the

father of modern India, to filmmaker Satyajit Ray (1920–92), probably the last larger-than-life figure India's encounter with the colonial West produced, even the most ardent modernists have had to engage in that dialogue, often with mixed results.[2] Sometimes this dialogue has to be established, through a tremendous effort of will, almost as an exercise in self-creation. Thus, Satyajit Ray has described in painful detail how he, as an urbane, highly Westernized Indian, discovered the Indian village while making a film trilogy that was to paradoxically become, for the world cinema, the last word on the Indian village. As this example itself shows, such implosive dialogues may be anguished, but they also sometimes allow enormously creative uses of living in two cultures.[3]

In politics, the most remarkable part of this dialogue with self is how little the modern Indian self is dependent on or in conversation with what is commonly believed to be the traditional Indian definitions of state, political authority, or political leadership. Despite the immense fascination with Kautilya within India and outside, the *Arthashastra* has not manifestly influenced the contemporary Indian's political self-definition. Indians have been even less influenced by the political history of ancient or medieval India and the conventions of statecraft unearthed by that history. Although large empires were run by a galaxy of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh dynasties, and although the histories of some of these dynasties have been grist for the mills of national and subnational chauvinism in recent times, on the whole they too have not left any significant memory trace behind. Ashoka is more of a living presence in contemporary Sri Lankan politics than in Indian. Although names such as Rana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh are ritually invoked in Hindu nationalist propaganda, no recent mainstream Indian politician has been influenced in the least by any of these worthies. Even as metaphors, these figures have been marginal to contemporary Indian public life. (The case of Shivaji is a little different because he has become identified with regional and non-Brahminic caste pride in one region of India.) If the cadres of the Hindu nationalist parties bring up these names once in a while in the service of their moth-eaten nineteenth-century colonial interpretation of Hinduism, the other modern Indians reject

them as parts of a cultural baggage that deserves to be only a target of millennial social engineering.

Apart from the colonial state, the only other state that has left some memory traces behind is the Mughal Empire, and that is partly because during the early years of the Raj, the style of governance and the culture of politics (especially the frame of legitimacy) were recognizably Mughal in some respects, and they were designed to be so.[4] Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the British in India were not only sometimes called "nabobs," but they also continued to rule India with one eye on the conventions of the Mughal Empire, the other on European ideas of statecraft. Even the official language of the Raj was Persian for about seventy-five years. The culture of the state for a long while after that reflected not only the influence of important currents of British political thought but also the culture that had crystallized during the first seventy-five years of the Raj. Bernard Cohn's work on the "codification of ritual idiom" under the Raj has a tacit narrative dealing with this bifocal vision: how the British defined themselves in India and how they sought to link this self-definition to the idea of the state in the minds of the ruled. For instance, the Darbar of 1911, Cohn suggests, replicated the Mughal court rituals in many ways and sought to derive consent for the Raj by systematically invoking Indian ideas of rulership.[5] The coronation of King George V was simultaneously a Mughal coronation.

However, by the 1860s, this culture became slowly marginalized and was pushed further underground by an increasingly assertive, Utilitarian ideology of the state that linked up with wider demands and expectations from the state in the more articulate, politicized sections of the Indian people. It is this second concept of state that has evolved gradually into a quasi-Hegelian imagination of the state in contemporary India. The process of transformation has not been entirely linear, but it has continued to have two identifiable features. First, this image of the ideal state is still heavily dependent on nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon texts on the state and its social evolutionist legacy; and second, that dependence has been defined much more by texts than by the practice of statecraft in Europe. As a result, the ideal state in modern India still carries with it a touch of purism and a certain fear of clumsiness, ambiguity, and the dirty

imprint of life. At the same time, there is paradoxically a continuous defensive attempt to define statecraft as a dirty, hard-eyed, masculine game of realpolitik that Indians, especially overly idealistic, romantic Indian critics of India's external policies and nuclear and security choices, cannot fathom.

Also, during the years India's modern political identity was being formed, the only real-life experience with the state to which the modern Indians were exposed was the imperial British-Indian state. Hence, the idea of the state that dominates modern India is that of an imperial state run, naturally enough now, by Westernized Indians well-versed in Anglo-Saxon theories of the state. Statecraft means for many Indians a centralized command structure; a patriarchal welfare system for the poor and the powerless; or an apparatus for impartial arbitration among permanently squabbling tribes, castes, religions, language groups, and regions, and for the slow and steady inculcation in the citizens of the spirit of Baconian science. Hence also the modern Indian's almost desperate belief that he or she stands between the wolves in the global nation-state system and the vulnerable sheep in the form of the irrational uninformed majority of the Indians.[6]

The picture does not change dramatically even when religious chauvinists begin to speak of a Hindu state. That state, too, remains quasi-Hegelian, and it, too, is associated with deep fears that the ordinary Hindus would not be able to sustain it. In fact, Hindu nationalists' hatred of the Muslims is matched only by their contempt for the other Hindus. For the nationalists would like to herd all Hindus, too, like cattle toward the beatitude of a well-defined nationality, hitched to a national-security state modeled on the nineteenth-century European concept of the state. Hindu chauvinists are plaintively waiting for a Hindu Bismarck to emerge who will forge a nineteenth-century nation-state at the far end of the twentieth century to liberate semi-Westernized Hindus from the non-Hindus on the one hand and from the infra-Hindus on the other. Even the ideology of Hindu nationalism, which is supposed to back up such a state, is pathetically dependent on European nationalism of the kind popularized by the likes of Mazzini and Herder, who wrote of culture as the soul of a people and whom many Hindu national-

ists in colonial times adored, as much perhaps for their ideological fervor as for their maudlin tone.[7]

A more clinical way of describing the situation could be to say that the modern Indians have stabilized their modern self by internalizing the colonial ideology of the state they confronted in the nineteenth century. Such a self has limited space for even the new currents of political culture—especially new editions of some other lesser-known ideas associated with the state in Europe and North America that have allowed them to partially transcend the gory history of wars and conquests in recent years. Modern Indians' frozen concept of the state contains not only indigenized European ideas of nationality, nationalism, progress, rationality, and secularism but even a unique concept of a desirable society built mostly on once-popular ideas of European thinkers and their Indian editions prepared by a series of Indian public figures. To give random examples, Bertrand Russell, H. G. Wells, Harold Laski, Christopher Caudwell, and Maurice Cornforth survived much longer in the warmer, grateful climate of the tropics than in the colder, forgetful climate of Europe and North America.

Such an imagination of the state includes a reactive component. Many Indians have, over the last one hundred years, worked hard to establish that Indian cultures had traditionally included each of the cultural prerequisites required for the sustenance of a modern state in India—from Baconian rationality to post-Reformation secularism. Once these previously repressed or cornered themes are rediscovered and revalued, their argument goes, whatever little contradiction between traditions and modernity that exists in India will dissolve, as has reportedly happened in countries like Japan.[8]

In this way of looking at the past, British rule was implicitly a God-sent instrument to modernize India and retool the natives, and such modernization had to involve the jettisoning of the "dysfunctional" and "degraded" aspects of heritage as a liability. The various brands of religious and ethnic nationalists have done one better. Their model being European nationalist thought, they have actually tried to subvert the organizational frame of the heritage and reconstruct it according to the needs of a modern nationality. If the record of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) looks abysmal in the

matter of India's freedom struggle, it is because Hindu national-
ism discovered quite early that silence, even if not direct collab-
oration with the colonial rule, paid handsome political
dividends and left it free to pursue its agenda against the
minorities on the one hand, and nonmodern and nonmoderniz-
able Hinduism on the other. The record of Muslim nationalism
in South Asia, of the kind represented by Syed Ahmad Khan,
perfectly mimics that of its sworn enemies among the Hindus.[9]
All these responses are probably contextualized by the growing
salience of what can only be called a historical or historicized
self in Indian public life.

II. The Enterprise of History

The first few generations of British administrators and English-
educated Indians produced a substantial volume of historical
work on India. Although historical scholarship (or at least some-
thing akin to that) was not entirely unknown to either Islamic or
Hindu traditions, the history the colonial historians produced
was disjunctive with the constructions of the past the South
Asians knew. It was history as it was conceptualized and institu-
tionalized by the European Enlightenment. In any event, in
South Asia history itself had never enjoyed the absolute or deep
legitimacy it had in modern Europe.[10] Nor did it enjoy or seek, in
its premodern forms, a monopoly on interpretations of the past.
Most South Asians used other ways of constructing the past;
European-style history to them was a new methodology/tech-
nology of organizing memories and a new form of conscious-
ness that seemed to negate many traditional categories of
thought and much of the traditional moral universe.

It is not clear what kind of legitimacy these new histories
came to enjoy in India outside the modern sector. They certainly
did not remain only in school and college texts; nor did they
replace other forms of memories in even the middle-class fami-
lies that opted for modern education and noisily and aggres-
sively began to lament the absence of historical memory in the
Indians.[11] Although many modernized Indians thought they had
shed their past and chosen to live with a truncated self that had
aggressively banished the ahistorical, next to them lived other
Indians, often in the same household, who led a life informed

with rich but nonhistorical modes of constructing the past — with living myths, legends, epics, and folkways. They also presumably had their own nonhistorical "theories" of what the historical mode meant or did.

The passions that attached to history among the historically minded Indians were, however, not the ones that attached to the discipline in the by-now-more-fully-historical societies. Nor was it the same as the attitude to history of those outside history. The newcomers to history implicitly saw history as a new kind of epic or moral myth that had to be constantly reaffirmed to fight the wretched state of Indian society. Enemies of history increasingly began to look to them like enemies of the Indian people. One is tempted to venture the proposition, in the context of the events of recent years, that one of the main sources of Hindu and Buddhist chauvinism in South Asia lies in the repressed, extra-historical attitude to history that survives in South Asia's historical self. In Pakistan, the same dynamics have come to inform the production and distribution of official history in a consumable form in recent decades.[12] History, while historicizing the world, dehistoricizes itself. The passions that underlie history, therefore, remain unnegotiated and begin to use history as a massive defensive shield and a new justification for violence and expropriation. The absence of self-reflexivity of Indian historians themselves and their tendency to prioritize history over life in the name of objectivity, neither an uncommon trait in the global culture of history, have contributed handsomely to the new, violent uses of history in India.

The idea of history, it should be obvious from the foregoing, has linked up with not merely the new idea of the state but also its various components, especially the emerging concepts of the national state, nationalism, and national security; the theory of progress as concretized in the ideas and processes of development; secularism, especially its various South Asian, Left-Hegelian versions; and a distinct Baconian concept of scientific rationality brought into public life as the final justification of all the other components.[13] When modern Indians, irrespective of their ideological postures, opted for the Utilitarian—and imperial—concept of the state, they also had to own up to the fact that European history was more relevant to Indian futures than the unreliable, scrappy accounts of the past in India. They did this

so systematically that some thinkers came to feel that India's history had been stolen and that the country was being forced to live on borrowed history.[14]

This emergence and acceptance of the historical self, then, became quickly intertwined with the making and unmaking of Indian pasts and the telescoped presence of European history in these attempts to ensure the reconstruction of India's past along historical lines. This came in two versions. Either India's historical past was made to look like a belated replication of European history, or it became, as in the various Left-Hegelian doctrines, all of India's past and, hence, a point of departure for all social criticism (so that in social and political analysis, the categories and the narratives could come from the First World, while the conclusions drawn and the prescriptions offered could apply to the Third World).[15] All other memories related to the past were pushed out of serious intellectual consideration in modern India and were kept open for the use of the rustic, the women, the creative artists, the illiterate, the insane, and the superstitious.

The self that emerges from the crucible of history has different features from that of the self that emerges from the crucible of myths, legends, and epics. In both cases, the self has to cope with memories, but the historical self configures memories differently from the way the ahistorical self does.

In the first case, memories are available for scrutiny, for tests of reliability and validity. The scrutiny is usually mounted from the vantage of what can be called distant, dispassionate objectivity, for such objectivity is supposed to guarantee the truth-value of propositions about the past. (The idea of truth used here is that of modern science, not that of the moral philosopher or cultural or "holistic" ecologist who might leave some scope for nonmaterial truths in his or her model.)[16] Memories that fail the scrutiny are in effect declared nonmemories or antimemories and are either banished from history or studied clinically as rumors or stereotypes, or handed over as fantasies to artists and writers for creative use. If some individuals and groups nevertheless insist on retaining or returning to these memories *in* history, they can do so; but others, if spiteful, would call such history pseudo-history or, if they were generous, myths or fantasies. There *are* persons or communities in the modern world that insist on living with "unreliable" and "invalid" history.[17]

These individuals and communities usually end up as case histories for psychiatrists and researchers in social pathology.

But there are other persons and groups outside the modern world who live with selves that originate and are grounded in ahistorical modes of constructing the past — in legends, myths, and epics — that cannot be that easily fitted into the clinical format, even though some first-generation, overenthusiastic psychoanalysts did try to do so at one time. Sometimes, when return to childhood or to unencumbered, creative innocence becomes an important cultural theme (as in the late 1960s and early 1970s), people and groups who make that kind of regression can even be seen as paragons of normality, creativity, and transcendental awareness. The epithets "primitive" and ahistorical may then begin to carry an ambivalent load in historical societies where they may occasionally provide a respite from the psychological closure the historical consciousness has come to represent.[18] Otherwise, the effort is usually to separate the historical self from its ahistorical contexts. (The ongoing debate about the personality and biography of Jesus Christ in Western Christendom, for instance, parallels similar debates that have been taking place since the middle of the nineteenth century about Hindu gods and goddesses.)[19]

Configuring the historically grounded self in an ahistorical society, however, acquires a second-order complexity where such a self does not get the "normal" consensual validation from either the community or the larger culture. Such a self has to work on limited or partial endorsement from the scraps of historical selves constructed in the modern sector, often by psychologically uprooted, atomized individuals and small sectlike professional groups. History in India is basically a modest enterprise having a limited reach; it is not the entire constructed past. It has to compete with other such constructions and can either triumph over them or lose out to them.[20]

III. Uprooting and Its Compensations

Nation-state and history, when wedded to an urban-industrial vision and attempts to actualize the vision through conventional development, become a potent combination. They become a complex of ideas particularly appealing to persons and groups

confronting the experience of uprooting, breakdown of communities, and a sense of exile. Whether it actually does so or not, this complex is presumed to work better when it operates on the assumption of a cultural tabula rasa and authenticates forms of cultural intervention that ensure the decline of communities and the reduction of the person turning India and its neighboring countries — trying to redress their record of victimhood by catching up with the developed societies, according to dominant contemporary ideas of success — into a territory of the territorially or psychologically uprooted. The ideas of nation-state and history have begun to play new, more important political-psychological roles in South Asia.

There is nothing specifically new in this situation. Most ancient-societies-turned-young-nation-states are learning to live in a world dominated by the psychology and culture of exile. For some, the twentieth century has been a century of refugees.[21] Others, like Hannah Arendt, have identified refugees as virtually a new "species" of human beings that has come to symbolize the violence of our times. Refugees as contemporary symbols, however, represent something more than the pathologies of the global nation-state system. They also represent a state of mind, a form of psychosocial displacement that has become endemic to modernizing societies. Defined thus, most refugees do not have to cross national frontiers to become refugees, and many, when they do so, are more "pulled" by the seductive appeals of self-induced displacement than the "push" of an oppressive or violent system.[22] It is this changed status of territoriality in human life that explains why, in immigrant societies like the United States, the metaphor of exile now looks jaded. There are some who have already begun to argue that human beings need not have a "home," that the idea itself is a red herring.[23] Given the cultural hierarchy in the world, many, it seems, have become reconciled to living with a labile sense of self. Displacement and the psychology of exile are in; cultural continuities and settled communities are out — they have a touch of ennui associated with them.

However, in societies such as China and India, which both citizens and outsiders were accustomed to viewing as relatively stable and unchanging, adjustment to the pacesetting role now given to the culture of exile is disorienting and unnerving. In

India, where the metaphor of eternal India continues as an important part of the public lexicon, the spread of the culture of uprootedness has produced new cultural dislocations and social tensions. Yet, many aspects of uprooting that take place in South Asia remain invisible. We have not yet noticed, for instance, that the psychology of displacement is becoming a serious presence in the South Asian landscape and that many elements of South Asian public life are readjusting to the culture of the uprooted. However, politicians everywhere are a superbly alert lot. They never wait for political scientists to supply analysis that would guide action. The South Asian politicians have grasped the power and the reach of this culture of psychological lability. They have sensed that, even though it is the culture of a minority, it nonetheless offers immense political opportunities, perhaps the most important of which is the scope it offers for large-scale mobilization. South Asian politicians, therefore, have refashioned their platforms and campaigns to cater to the passions of the banished and the uprooted.

As a result, the metaphor of continuity has paradoxically acquired a strange new status in Indian public life — it has become a potent myth. This is precisely because a large proportion of Indians feel uprooted geographically, culturally, and psychologically, and, while living with a culture of flux that they have accepted as a ruling culture, want small, symbolic areas of a turbulence-free life of predictability and continuity. These Indians demand psychological security and cultural constancy of a kind that not even a highly stable, isolated society can provide. These demands are honed by the growing evidence of flux all around. In this respect, what the great Partition riots in 1947 could not do, despite uprooting (on a conservative estimate) ten million people, massive urbanization and industrialization backed by development have managed to do. Many communities in India are now predominantly, and in some cases entirely, communities of the displaced. Estimates are that one-third of the entire tribal population of India, consisting of at least 200 different tribes, has been displaced.[24] That is, some tribes are now entirely tribes of refugees, uprooted from their natural habitats, traditional vocations, lifestyles, and life-support systems. Their deculturation and disintegration as communities are virtually complete.

Some other communities have been dramatically pushed into urban industrial life because of the loss or unsustainability of their traditional vocations or growing social discrimination or exploitation. When India became independent, its urban population was around 70 million. Today, although the population of urban Indians has risen by only 5 percent to about 25 percent, they already number nearly 250 million — larger than all but three countries in the world. We do not have corresponding figures for Indians who move from one language area to another, from communities to individuated urban slums, from rooted vocations to contractual jobs. Many of these first-generation urban Indians show the characteristic psychology of the uprooted, and they, too, have begun to bend the Indian political culture to their needs. Many communities of traditional artisans, especially the Muslims and the Dalits, fall into this category. Also, as agriculture becomes industrialized, many landless laborers and small farmers are unable to sustain their traditional vocations. They are migrating to the cities and assembling there in urban slums, which are becoming the down-market depots of the culture of exile.

In recent decades, agriculture has handsomely contributed to the growth of the culture of the slum. The economic growth and prosperity resulting from large-scale cultivation of crash crops like sugarcane has led to demands for mega-dams, diversion or monopolization of water resources, deforestation, drought, and rising salinity in some parts of the region. Thus, the Farakka barrage and the destruction of the Ganges have led to uprooting and emigration not only from Southwest Bangladesh to India but also from Bihar and, to a lesser extent, West Bengal to other parts of India.

This is an age of exile in many senses. Not only have many communities that until recently seemed settled experienced colossal dislocation through migration, war, unbridled urbanization, and megadevelopment, but a large part of the world is also now inhabited by people who have experienced or carry within them memories of uprooting. Even nowadays when we talk of a global order dominated by one superpower, that power represents, among other things, the power of the immigrants, the refugees, the uprooted, the decultured and/or recultured. It is this culture, and the public values that can survive in a society

of uprooted, that dominates the global cultural order. Few will disagree that America *is* primarily a culture of the uprooted, but fewer will admit that it is a culture of the uprooted that must deny that it is atypical, that it prefers to see itself as a model for the rest of the world, a haven where the poor, the powerless, and the discarded of other lands have come and remade their lives voluntarily and produced a culture that now makes trans-cultural sense. This preference is continuously endorsed by the elites of other countries, especially that of the Third World, con-stantly talking of catching up with the United States in the dis-tant future.

That culture of exile now seeks to remake the world in its own image. In fact, the entire post-World War II world and the sec-ond half of the twentieth century can be read as the unfolding of the politics of that effort, though the celebration of the effort had begun before the effort had, in the interwar years. This is no wholesale criticism of the culture of uprootedness. In fact, it is an acknowledgement that while some of this century's greatest creative achievements might have come from uprooting, decul-turation, and the breakdown of communities, some of the great-est pathologies of our times, too, can be traced to the sense of exile and loneliness that has haunted the modern individual. The ambience of the Weimar Republic and the cultural citadels of Europe, such as Paris, Vienna, and London in the interwar years—the celebration of loneliness, exile, uncertainty, and limi-nality in lifestyles, literature, fine arts, and cinema—contributed to the closure of the European mind in the 1930s. To speak in terms of extremes, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Albert Camus (1913–60) are part of the same cultural process that produced European fascism.

The self that modernity-as-exile spawns has a few specific fea-tures. In its more integrative form, it is compatible with what Robert J. Lifton calls the protean personality.[25] In its more prob-lematic form, it tends to underwrite many of the pathologies that have been major markers of the twentieth century. While the overstretched modern self offers us a wide range of choices for self-construction and self-expression, it cannot adequately protect our self-consistency and self-continuity. That consis-tency and continuity have to be sought through specialist options — psychotherapy, religious or spiritual self-discovery

movements, millennialism in politics, and, above all, ethno-religious chauvinism and nationalism.

India has chosen to confront its overstretched modernity mainly through ethnic chauvinism and ultranationalism. Few have recognized the promise of psychological security and "therapeutic" solace that fundamentalism and ethnic conflicts have begun to offer in modernizing India. To this India, the violence outside promises to bind the violence within. Those living in this India survive on a dislocated cultural self-definition precariously perched on a labile sense of the self and are, for that very reason, continually seeking to ground it in a sense of community that would restore some cultural — and through it, personal — continuity.[26] They may not be open to serious political appeals or to deep analysis of public life, but they are open to populist slogans and demagoguery, especially of the type that promises new brands of communitarian pseudo-solidarity à la Hannah Arendt. In open societies based on competitive party systems, politicians seeking to mobilize the massified sections of the citizens for electoral purposes through centralized communication machines quickly identify these needs and exploit them in various innovative ways.[27]

In recent decades, South Asian slums, like their South American and East Asian counterparts, have become the ultimate targets of all kinds of extremist groups—from ethnic chauvinists to crime syndicates like the *cosa nostra*—that promise the individual a community and a chance of escape from loneliness and massification. The "antisocial elements" that political analysts and journalists in South Asia incessantly blame for ethnic and communal violence are merely the fringe of a large social sector nearer home that the middle classes in the region would like to forget.

> The clearest example of this came when the Babri Masjid was demolished. The movement leading up to the event—the biggest of its kind since Independence — had received its most active support from middle-class populations in small towns and cities; it now turned out that a majority in the demolition-squad [*sic*] also came from provincial backgrounds.
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> History was made that day, but not by metropolitan India which was relegated to the level of captive bystanders, released

afterwards to deal with the repercussions of the event through either post-facto analysis or communal rioting. Provincial India had upstaged it, and in doing so had only given a small demonstration of its potential.

For, apart from demolishing the Babri Masjid and so peremptorily revising the national agenda, it was also…bringing forth a new kind of sensibility: one that could combine in itself a taste for strident politics, violent films, ostentatious architecture, lewd music, rumour-mongering newspapers, and overcooked food.

…From all accounts, Indian small towns and cities had shed their earlier sleepy, half-apologetic air.[28]

These newly self-assertive identities are generally susceptible to the appeals of various forms of nationalism that depend on centralized, mass-media-based communications and mobilizational strategies. India may not be a mass society, but even the process of massification has released new demands and created spaces for ideologies that promise to fill the void that the breakdown of communities and "primordialities" has created. These promises are based on packaged forms of faiths that can serve both as substitutes for faiths seemingly unable to survive in their earlier form under globalized lifestyles and as political ideologies particularly suited to middle-class mobilization. In both incarnations, the ideologies permit a certain degree of canalization of what would otherwise be free-floating violence.

But apart from its close links with the growing culture of violence, the psychology of uprootedness and exile is associated with a number of personality traits that have been much adored in the literature and folklore of development: greater individual initiative, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness. Immigrants are comparatively more pushy, more risk-taking, and less burdened by principles of sociality and shared cultural norms in their professional and business deals.[29] The refugees created in the aftermath of the Partition in western India, on whom there are some scrappy data, are aggressive within family and outside, and their trust in the interpersonal world around them is low.[30] This aggressiveness and distrust acquire a dangerous edge because the refugees also tend to have a stronger sense of invulnerability.[31] One of the unnoticed findings of the once-popular studies of achievement motive as the engine of economic

growth was the links between spatial mobility, uprootedness, and higher levels of achievement motivation.[32] Indeed, to complete the picture of the contemporary ideal of the achieving person, David McClelland borrowed from *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes* the imagery of Hermes, the Hellenic god who began traveling the day he was born.

Hermes presumably had a place to come back to, and that myth of a place of return must have been for all believers a living reality for centuries. In contemporary times, the chances are that such an idea of return, or of a place to return to, has primarily a mythic status and is available mainly as a consumable fantasy. Vladimir Nabokov's Russia and Salman Rushdie's India are obvious examples.

IV. The Myth of Return

Perhaps the basic formulation in this essay can now be further sharpened. South Asia is now linked to the global order not merely through its modern political self but, more specifically, through historicized readings of its past and the traumata of uprootedness. Both are seeking in the ideology of the state, and in various forms of nationalism floating around in the market, greater psychological security, stability, and symbolic redress of cultural defeat.

However, that formulation does not say much about how the modern political self in India confronts the panoply of other selves or about the unequal contest among those selves to shape the future of India's political culture and the nature of transformative politics in the region. This brings us back to the issue of a political self that is primarily in dialogue with itself because such an act includes a dialogue with the world. True, that conversation with self can be defensive, for it is a conversation partly with those who have been defined either as being on the other side of a monolithic granite wall of traditions or as masses of poor, culturally deprived, somewhat obstreperous trainee citizens. But it is conversation nonetheless. The fact that it takes place gives it a political status of its own. Without these dialogical experiences, the modern Indian's nineteenth-century political self will be even more in touch with the past of Europe than

with its present, even more in touch with Europe's construction of India than with India as most other Indians see it or live it.

To build a political self outside this model is to build partly outside history and science; it is to begin living partly outside modern India, seeing those already living there as outcasts. That is a painful choice socially and even psychologically. Such a skepticism toward the mainstream culture of elite politics demands a different set of identifications, empathy, and forms of psychological mobility. It involves the admission that most Indians most of the time live in another India. De-recognizing this forgotten majority, in an open society and in competitive democratic politics, is a sure prescription for political defeat and an even surer indicator of the precariousness of the modern self in India. This is a contradiction built into India's political self that nothing, not even the immense power of globalization and unbridled capitalism, can remove. It has to be worked through the way the process of psychoanalysis does with a case *history* of self — by "contemporarizing" history, by ahistoricizing history in order to access levels of consciousness that are nonhistorical or, as the moderns would have it, prehistorical. As in all clinical disciplines, history has to be coped with and opened up for intervention by converting diachronicity into synchronicity. Clinically, then, history is not a way of structuring the past but of opening up the present and the future.[33]

Contemporary concerns, then, are throwing up different concepts of cultures in South Asia; they challenge the universality of the modern self grounded in the European experience with the Enlightenment. Such thrusts are not relativistic but bring forth alternative forms of cosmopolitanism and universalism.[34] They seem to question the Enlightenment's implicit faith that while there can be many forms of relativism, there can be only one form of universalism. These alternative forms can be destabilizing; they challenge the meaning of life of generations of Indians who, under the colonial dispensation, worked with nineteenth-century European concepts of the Indian culture and had a much more romantic and optimistic image of the European enterprise on the world stage.[35] These Indians see the growing demands for the renegotiation of terms between culture and modern selfhood as destructive. The demands seem to negate the modern social and religious reform movements that

began in the 1820s and, thus, the core legitimacy of the modern nation-state and the elite who seem born to it. The fact that there has been some erosion in the cultural self-confidence of European and North American intellectual elites, and some openness to multiculturalism among them, has further unnerved modern Indians. For that, too, seems to endorse the movement of the peripheralized Indians, unexposed or hostile to the modern self, to the center of the political stage.

As a result, exactly as the historical self in India is contextualized by the passions and interests of the nonhistorical modes of construction of the past, the modern self too is buffeted by premodern, nonmodern, or countermodern categories and passions. Not merely outside but also within. This is another stratum of political awareness that shapes modernity fundamentally without being much influenced by it.

V. Contending Selves

In Werner Herzog's movie *Where the Green Ants Dream*, there is a moving sequence where an old Australian Aborigine, who does not speak a word of English, barges into the witness box during a court trial that is about to decide the land rights of Australian Aborigines vis-à-vis a uranium mining company. The man begins to deliver a long speech in an incomprehensible language. The shocked judge tells the lawyer fighting the cause of the Aborigines that he should restrain his client. The lawyer cannot, and when he tries to communicate with the trespasser with the help of the other Aborigines, even they fail. It then transpires that the man in the witness box is the last surviving member of an extinct tribe and nobody in the world understands him.

This moment in the movie can be read in two ways. First, it is a moment that stresses the meaningless survival of an individual who cannot share his thoughts with anyone in the world and has to wait for a lonely death to finalize the extinction of a cultural species and a community. It is also, however, a moment that symbolizes the bankruptcy of the dominant global consciousness complicit with the process of extinction, a consciousness that does not even know that it is impoverished by the death of a cultural strain or aware of the brutalization unleashed by that insensitivity. Savagery lies not where the indigenous

people once stayed or are staying, nor where the dirty work of colonialism or development is done, Herzog seems to suggest, but at the cultural centers of our ideas of cosmopolitanism and impartial justice.

Herzog, who must have lived through the eras of German reconstruction, megadevelopment, and the Green movement, uses a number of cinematic devices to convey his message. For instance, he "sets the stage" by painting a picture of a totally polluted environment and a pockmarked landscape, bearing manmade scars like the victim of some terrible skin disease. Herzog also makes it clear at the beginning who has won the battle of the worlds and who rules the world today. Only ideologically motivated, lonely individuals within the system can now sometimes see through it. To do so, they have to be either someone like the ineffective but well-intentioned, innocent hero or someone morally repelled by the ruling culture, such as the eccentric anthropologist living as a recluse outside civilization or the liberal public interest lawyer. They are the ones who provide scrappy, moving, but also doomed resistance or dissent.

This flimsy base of dissent in the personal morality of a few atomized individuals is matched by the loveably arcane, dissenting ideology used by the Aborigines protesting uranium mining in their ancestral lands, namely their belief that uranium mining will disturb the dreams of the green ants and thus threaten the survival of the world. Herzog's brilliance ultimately convinces his audience that the Aborigines' belief deserves a treatment other than psychoanalysis, that it probably represents a higher-order sanity and rationality. Yet, the movie leaves one with the overall impression of incommensurability and self-defeating charity on the one hand, and "inaudible" dissent on the other.

In Satyajit Ray's *Agantuk* (The Visitor), the same social problem is differently posed and handled. Ray, in his last years a newcomer to the world of environmentalism, seems much less aware of what he is doing politically. *Agantuk* is the story of the "lost" uncle of a typical urban middle-class family in Calcutta whom the family knows basically as a professional globetrotter. He briefly returns, uninvited, as a suspicious stranger to his family to upset the steady, predictable rhythm of middle-class conformism. The uncle, who turns out to be a distinguished

anthropologist, has by now turned into a savage critic of modern civilization and its cultural stratarchies. The dramatic high point of the film comes when the uncle suddenly leaves and the paranoic family finds out that the uncle was not a crook after the family's wealth, but had actually come to will his property to the family. The family desperately looks for its benefactor and locates him in a village of Santals, one of the most systematically victimized communities in India's march toward modernity. The real communication between generations begins when the wife, who was always a little more open to the stranger, joins the Santals in an uninhibited dance. This time the uncle accepts her fully because in her attempts to self-transcend, he sees the beginning of self-discovery and a continuation of his own critical self.

There is no devastated landscape or Tarkovsky-like invocation of the terror of soul-killing hyper-urbanity in Ray. The Santal village, it turns out, is not very far from Calcutta, and it survives in poverty, indignity, and neglect, but also in simplicity and natural charm. On the other hand, the "modern affluence" of the urban middle-class family is not that conspicuous or consumption-oriented either. To many Western and some South Asian viewers, Ray's idea of affluence might even look like another less obtrusive version of poverty. There is also a vague, tacit admission in the narrative that the urban middle class that is being depicted as conformist and myopic is, while increasingly vociferous and dominant, not the whole of India, that the class still constitutes a minority. The divide between the urbane bourgeois life and the world of the uncle and his Santal friends *is* sharp, but there is no frontier of incommensurability between the two. When the heroine joins the Santals in their dance, she is not so much actualizing the dream of her uncle as admitting a previously repressed part of herself. The rest of the family certainly doesn't feel embarrassed by her spontaneity either. The community in some sense has been restored, even if only symbolically.

Thus, what is a basic incommensurability in Herzog's finale is a problem of partitioned self in Ray's. It's as if Ray, otherwise a fully formed ideologue of modernity, was admitting that certain possibilities open only through the exercise of moral imagination in the case of the Australian Aborigines were open in India through self-excavation and the ability to "work through" one's

not-so-deep psychological defenses. As if to Ray, globalization were not the end of cultures, for as globalization made inroads into the interstices of cultures, so did the politics of cultural self-affirmation and self-exploration.

Exactly as some South Sea Islanders paid for the blessings of civilization by contracting syphilis, anthropologist and political activist Fred Chiu suggests, globalized capital has to pay for its expansion by facing the proliferating movements and strains of consciousness — romantic, nasty, utopian, backward-looking, given to excesses, insane. Such affirmations of cultures and identities never restore the past. For post-globalization affirmation of traditions is different from the affirmation of cultures when attacks on culture are seen as external and not as something threatening to take over one's household, children, friends, and even one's most intimate moments (through standardized textbooks on parent-child relations or by offering consumers a choice of shades and textures in condoms, for instance). It is possible to argue that this new, often-insecure self-affirmation brings onto the world stage a new strain of cultures and identities that lack the easy, less-self-aware affirmation of cultures and identities when they are not threatened. Often the new affirmations bring out traditions and cultures badly contaminated by the principles of dominance and violence that characterize the present global mass culture. The Islam that has come into play in many exiled communities — among Palestinian refugees, Pakistanis in Bradford (England), Bosnians, or Indians on American campuses—is not the same as the Islam that is a part of everyday life in much of the Islamic world. The intellectual challenge is to identify the principal characteristics of this reactive affirmation of cultures and identities in South and Southeast Asia in the hope that it will also convey something of the common human experience with the politics of cultural selfhood and with the more specific tragedy of lost or stolen memories in other parts of the world.

Notes

1. This essay was written for the 1996 Macalester International Roundtable, St. Paul, Minnesota, 3–5 October 1996. It is, as is obvious from the unduly large number of references to my earlier work, also an apologetic conversation with myself to formulate more neatly an argument I have been grappling with for a

long time. I seek the reader's forgiveness for this self-indulgence. I am grateful to Rustum Singh for his suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. Ashis Nandy, "Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence, and Protest," in *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays on Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1-31, and "Satyajit Ray's Secret Guide to Exquisite Murders," in *The Savage Freud and Other Essays in Possible and Retrievable Selves* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 237–66.

3. Ashis Nandy, "Satyajit Ray's India" in *Deep Focus* 6 (1996): 32–38; and "The Imagination of the Village," a paper presented at the *Samskritishivira* (workshop on cultural studies) organized by Ninasam, Heggodu, Karnataka, 10–20 October 1994.

4. So even today, remembering the Mughal culture remains a way of going ethnic that the heritage of the Raj defines as elegant, authentic, and safe. This is another way of reading Mukul Kesavan's work on the "Islamicate frame of Indian popular cinema." Mukul Kesavan, "Urdu, Awadh, and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of the Hindi Cinema," in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, ed. Zoa Hasan (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991), 244–58. Following Marshall Hodgson, Kesavan distinguishes between the Islamic and Islamicate, the latter standing for "the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims" (246).

5. Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in his *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 632–82.

6. Ashis Nandy, "Culture, State, and the Rediscovery of Indian Politics," in *Literary India: Comparative Studies in Aesthetics, Colonialism, and Culture*, ed. Patrick C. Hogan and Lalita Pandit (New York: The State University of New York, 1995, 255–70.

7. For some idea of the ambivalent meaning that at least Herder has acquired in our times, see Pierre Birnbaum, "From Multiculturalism to Nationalism" in *Political Theory* 24, no. 1 (1996): 33–45.

8. The best-known effort along these lines is Deviprasad Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959).

9. Shan Mohammad, ed., *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan* (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1972). I have in mind mainly those comments of Sir Syed which reek with contempt for the "people of low rank" and "humble origin" (for instance, p. 208).

10. Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles" in *History and Theory* 34 (theme issue): *World Historians and Their Critics* (1995): 44–66. Recently, the argument has been ventured that there are no universal, timeless principles dividing the historical from the ahistorical societies. Kerwin Lee Klein, "In Search of Narrative Mastery: Post-modernism and the People without His-

tory" in *History and Theory* 34, no. 4 (1995): 275–98. That, however, is like saying that no culture has timeless attributes. However, cultures change and yet remain identifiably the same cultures. I believe that it is likewise possible to say that while the principles of separation might change, cultures may still remain different. Perhaps the problem arises because the "double plot" of which Klein speaks takes into account local and global histories, but not the local meanings of global histories, when the only politically and intellectually challenging act may be to make that tripartite division so as to empower competing versions of global history and, implicitly, universalism.

11. See Vinay Lal, "On the Perils of History and Historiography: The Case, Puzzling as Usual, of India," unpublished manuscript (1988), and "The Discourse of History and the Crisis at Ayodhya: Reflections on the Production of Knowledge, Freedom, and the Future of India" in *Emergence* 5/6 (1993-94): 4–44; and Nandy's "History's Forgotten Doubles."

12. Ayesha Jalal, "Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 73–89.

13. Some of these links have been acknowledged by historian Dipesh Chakravarti, though he may not be totally hostile to history's love affair with secularism, development, and modern science. Dipesh Chakravarty, "History as Critique and Critique of History," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 September 1991, 2262–68.

14. For instance, this was Rabindranath Tagore's reading of Indian nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917; reprint, Madras: Macmillan, 1985). See on this theme, Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

15. This is not merely a South Asian disease. Any serious Afro-Asian scholar who has read the ethnophobic, crypto-racist histories produced in Europe and North America by some of the most respected figures in contemporary radical thought—from H. G. Wells to Eric Hobsbawm—will immediately know what I am saying. In all these works, "agency," social creativity, and transformative politics are monopolized by the Northern Hemisphere, not to speak of the analytic categories that structure the work. H. G. Wells, *A Short History of the World* (1922; reprint London: Pelican, 1965); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (New Delhi: Viking, 1995).

16. For a brief introduction to the "historical" battle over the disputed mosque in Ayodhya, in which both sides claim scientized history to be on their side, see Lal, "The Discourse of History and the Crisis at Ayodhya."

17. I use these two terms in the sense in which mathematical statisticians use them when assessing new psychological, political, or social measures such as attitude scales or personality inventories.

18. Postmodernism, whatever its other merits or demerits may be, can be read as the formalization of this awareness and, thus, as a successful attempt to locate the world capital of dissent in the West by appropriating the available non-Western critiques of the West.

19. Ashis Nandy, "A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia." Plenary address at the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, 24 November 1996 (forthcoming).

20. Ibid. There are also examples of this clash in Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

21. Nicholas Xenos, "Refugees: The Modern Political Condition" in *Alternatives* 18 (1993): 419–30.

22. This is not to estimate the push but to recognize that voluntary emigration is only another kind of uprooting, and the difference between it and forced emigration must not have been that pronounced in systems suffering from chronic discrimination, exploitation, and the early rigors of development. The last-named ailment is painful to acknowledge, though it has been known and feared since the days when it did not have its present meaning. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (London: Verso Gollancz, 1945).

23. Aviezer Tucker, "In Search of Home" in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1995): 181–87.

24. Smitu Kothari, *Theorizing Culture, Nature, and Democracy in India* (Delhi: Lokayan, 1993).

25. Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic, 1993). Lifton does take into account the backlogs—the broken connection—of the protean self but, on the whole, he seems reconciled to this new psychodynamic of self.

26. Not only in India but in Pakistan and Bangladesh, too, a high proportion of the leaders of the ultranationalist, ethnic chauvinist, and fundamentalist groups have a background of uprooting. This is consistent with the emergence of the South Asian diaspora as one of the main sources of support for communal and ethnic chauvinism in recent decades. Strange though this may sound, the diasporic communities are becoming the psychological and cultural counterparts of the slums in metropolitan India.

27. Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, and Achyut Yagmik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

28. Pankaj Mishra, *Butter Chicken in the Ludhiana* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995), 11. The "earlier, sleepy, half-apologetic air" probably came from the wide consensus that these towns mediated between the rural and the urban, whereas they have now become the phalanx of metropolitan India, reaching into the heart of the countryside and sometimes reentering metropolitan India as a transmogrified version of its own agenda for the rest of the country.

29. They are the kinds of people described in that underrated and forgotten book, Stephen Keller, *Uprooting and Social Change: The Role of Refugees in Development* (Delhi: Manohar, 1975).

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid. Some South Asian readers may remember how an archetypal, new hero in Indian popular cinema stormed into public consciousness in the 1970s

with exactly this combination of traits. He operated at the margins of law, sometimes outside it, but always with a tinge of nostalgia for the earlier, soft, androgynous hero that had dominated the screen for nearly fifty years. See "Introduction: The Popular Cinema as the Slum's Eye View of Indian Politics," in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Popular Cinema*, ed. Ashis Nandy (London: Zed Press and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, in press).

32. David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1961). Everett E. Hagen's attempts to trace economic growth to "displaced elites" and their psychological state of "retreatism" can also be read as an early celebration of the culture of the uprooted as the source of a modern political economy. Everett E. Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1962).

33. Nandy, "History's Forgotten Double."

34. Random examples are Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988); Claude Alvares, *Science, Development, and Violence: The Twilight of Modernity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Frédérique Apffel Marglin and Stephen Marglin, eds., *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture, and Resistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and *Decolonising Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Ramchandra Gandhi, *Sita's Kitchen: A Testimony of Faith and Inquiry* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).

35. Even someone as rooted in his culture as Rabindranath Tagore confessed to such an optimism and the disappointment that followed its betrayal by Europe's death dance in the form of two world wars. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Crisis of Civilisation* (Bombay: International Book House, 1941).