

Title—The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age, and Ideology in British India
Author—Ashis Nandy
Year—1988

Categories: Colonialism, Gender, Theory, Politics

Place: British Raj

Time: 1750-1950

Argument Synopsis:

Nandy's piece "The Psychology of Colonialism" comes from her book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. She examines how the colonial ideology of British India was built on the cultural meanings of two fundamental categories of institutional discrimination in Britain, sex and age, and how these meanings confronted their traditional Indian counterparts and their new incarnations in the figure of Gandhi. Nandy claims that colonialism could be characterized by the search for economic and political advantage without concomitant real economic or political gains. Specifically, she seeks to explore some of the psychological contours of colonialism in the rulers and the ruled. She highlights how colonialism worked within existing Western sexual stereotypes—the British utilized the homology between sexual and political dominance. Nandy notes how this homology did not exist under Company rule and was established with the establishment of Crown rule over India.

Nandy demonstrates the change in consciousness that came about with the transition to Crown rule as three concepts became central to colonial India: the essence of masculinity, the essence of femininity, and the essence of hermaphroditism. In the dominant culture of the colony, manliness represented aggression, achievement, control, competition, and power. Gandhi made use of these categories in his attempt to give centrality to non-violence as a major Hindu, or Indian, virtue. Nandy argues that colonial India ultimately produced a transcultural protest against the hyper-masculine world view of colonialism, through Gandhi. Gandhi was clear that activism and courage could be liberated from aggressiveness and recognized as perfectly compatible with womanhood.

Nandy posits that the cultural and psychological pathologies produced by colonization are less well known in the colonizing societies, compared to the colonized. She argues that the experience of colonizing did not leave the internal culture of Britain untouched. She identifies four distinct responses invoked by the cultural pathologies of colonialism: pathetic self-hatred and ego constriction; relative sense of freedom and critical morality which were the true antitheses of colonialism and which could only be acquired by working through the colonial consciousness; indirect, unselfconscious, and overtly apolitical; and wholly opting out of colonial society and fighting for the cause of India. Nandy emphasizes that colonialism is a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated in the minds of men.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Define colonialism as a shared culture which may not always begin with the establishment of alien rule in a society and end with the departure of the alien rulers
- Consensus that Indian men could 'redeem' their masculinity by becoming a part of the colonial system according to the established rules
- Just as the language of revolution hid within it the message of continuity, the language of continuity contained the message of disjunction