

## US INDIAN NEWS

---

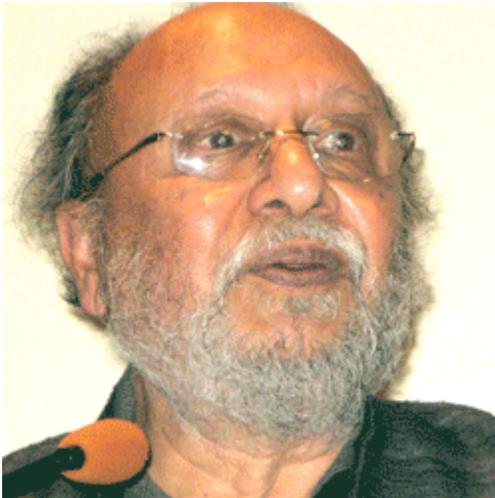
### Hate Not Last Word in Partition: Nandy

By ASHFAQUE SWAPAN  
indiawest.com

March 13, 2009 03:53:00 PM

BERKELEY, Calif. — It was not hatred, but a strong undercurrent of humanity, that was the surprising finding of research on the traumatic bloodbath of the Partition, iconoclastic Indian researcher Ashis Nandy told an audience March 3 at the University of California.

Nandy made some unconventional points: Even in the terrible bloodbath that claimed the lives of millions, as many as one in four people among survivors said they were saved by the other community, and their fondest memories were still of the days when they lived with the ostensibly enemy community. He added that while those who engaged in the killings virtually got off scot-free, they paid a price in terms of mental and physical health and some even accepted culpability in their later age.



Nandy, a political psychologist and social theorist whose path-breaking work has revitalized scholarship on political psychology, the Indian encounter with colonialism, mass violence, nationalism and culture, was the featured speaker at the Sarah Kailath lecture here.

In 2008, Nandy was listed as one of the top 100 public intellectuals of the world by the magazine Foreign Policy. UC Berkeley sociology Prof. Raka Ray, chair of the Center for South Asia Studies, introduced him as an “intellectual extraordinaire” who was India’s first postcolonial theorist, calling him a “prototypical public intellectual” and India’s most famous dissenter.

“I am a little perturbed by my steady decline into respectability, and I do not know what to do about it,” quipped Nandy, who brought an avuncular bonhomie to his lecture.

Nandy highlighted his presentation with gripping stories of individuals caught in the maelstrom of murder, hatred and exile in 1946-48.

According to conservative estimates, roughly one million people died, but Nandy puts the figure to over two million.

Nandy and associates carried out a study that included about 1,300 interviews with survivors of the Partition violence of 1946-48, including 100 in-depth interviews.

“When we started the study, we depended heavily on available data on other genocides, and I must say some of the things did not fit,” Nandy said.

"The first finding that surprised us that nearly one-fourth of all survivors said that they owed their survival to somebody from the opposition," he said. "This figure was astonishing because nowhere we have come anywhere near it — in any other genocide."

Another surprising finding was the lack of rancor among direct victims, he said.

"The second finding is ... that those who actually faced the violence, those who are direct victims, the first generation of victims, those who have been subject to the violence, those who have seen it first-hand, mostly were those who had lesser prejudice and lesser bitterness about their experience than their own children and their grandchildren because they had lived in communities where the other side was the majority," Nandy said. "They have lived with them and they had very warm memories of that experience. Many of them have said that those were the best days of their lives, whereas the children have a packaged view mostly of those violent days and how the family survived . . . So they carry more bitterness, more hostility."

Nandy focused on an individual to underscore some of his points. During the research on the Partition, an associate had interviewed Madan Lal Pahwa, who was raised in what is now Pakistan.

Raised in a "kattar" (orthodox) Hindu family, Pahwa grew up to become a Hindu militant. He participated in vigilante groups that killed Muslims, said Nandy, and even threw a bomb at a prayer meeting of Mahatma Gandhi five days before Gandhi's assassination.

Many years later, during an interview for the research, Pahwa appeared to have mellowed considerably.

What was Pahwa's most treasured memory? "It is Pak Pattan (his ancestral village in Pakistan)," Nandy said. "And what he remembers in Pak Pattan the most, not only what he called the pure air and the pure milk and the green vegetables . . . above all (Muslim Sufi spiritual leader) Baba Farid's mazar (tomb). He used to sneak out at night from his home . . . and with his friends go to the mazar.

"That Sufi music and the singing he remembers as the most valuable moments of his life. The memory of the shared shrine, the Sufi music, the ambiance of the mazar had left a deep impression on him."

Pahwa also subsequently revised his earlier blanket condemnation of Muslims. "Muslims were otherwise friendly people," Pahwa reportedly said. "A small minority of Muslims were bad, the politicians."

"In South Asia, living with multiple selves is not an exception, we don't diagnose it as schizophrenia," Nandy quipped.

"I don't think you should be surprised that even Madan Lal Pahwa showed at least some awareness somewhere that he was culpable," he said.

"Fanaticism drives a person but insaniyat — humanity — is also there," Nandy said.

Nandy also mentioned a "third striking feature of this genocide."

"I have yet to meet, or any of our team has yet to meet, a killer who is happy in his old age," he

said. "I am yet to meet a happy killer. Even the ones that claim to be at perfect peace with themselves either have psychosomatic ailments or other instances of mental ill health directly traceable to the experience during the violence of '46-48. So escaping prosecution is not the last word in this matter."

India's pre-partition history of various communities living together was the result of a pre-Western tradition of tolerance, Nandy said. This became clear after he researched the 600-year history of communal peace in the Kerala port city of Kochi.

The initial response of people, when asked about their history of peace, was predictable.

"They gave all the responses people like us would love," Nandy said. People said that the absence of violence was because people were secular, progressive and educated.

However, said Nandy, deeper examination revealed something else.

"Nobody liked anybody else. Tolerance, alas, was based on mutual dislike," he said. "Every community thought they were the best. Yet in Cochin there was no instance of serious violence in 600 years of recorded history.

"And then gradually I deciphered that in a community-based society, a society where individuation has not gone beyond a point, there is bound to be this dislike and this sense of superiority. . .

"But whereas you think your community is the best you also learn the (other) community's right to believe they are the best. That mutuality is there. Secondly, the other is not only the other, but they are a part of you, you internalize. . . . The other is crucial to your self-definition. . . There are no annihilatory fantasies. . .

"This is not the enlightenment vision of cosmopolitanism, it is the alternative form of cosmopolitanism, and I am now convinced that this is the cosmopolitanism with which societies based on communities survive."

He said that the most bitter opponents of Gandhi, including his killers, didn't dislike him mainly because of his perceived appeasement of Muslims. Gandhi's critics in India hated him because they thought he was too mired in tradition to allow India to develop as a modern state, Nandy said.

However, that may have been Gandhi's strong suit, Nandy suggested.

"Somewhere Gandhi's strength lay not in conforming to the ideas of proper politics of modern India and middle classes, that in any case found him a liability and a problem, people like you and me, perhaps his strength lay partly in the folk traditions of India, in the realities of India that is outside the reach of modern India," Nandy said.