Chapter Six

Modernity, Gender and Identity in *The Ibis Trilogy*

In each of us two powers preside, one male, one female…

The androgynous mind is resonant and porous…

Naturally creative incandescent and undivided.

—Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*, 98)

"We had our heroes but our heroes were always androgynous"

— Ashis Nandy ("An Interview with Ashis Nandy", 730)

I

Colonialism has always worked under the assumed values of patriarchy and modernity. Walter D. Mignolo has pointed out that 'the colonial matrix of power' is founded upon the twin pillars of racism and patriarchy. The role of gender in colonial occupation is significant because gender is the arena where patriarchy, racism and modernity become complicit with each other in ensuring subjugation of the colonised. Colonialism imposed new norms of sexuality and gender upon the colonised. As a result, the precolonial notions of sexuality and gender of the colonised were deemed as deviant, irrational and primitive.

Colonial system invented new categories like 'man,' 'woman,' 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual.' It also introduced "regulations for "normal" relations among the sexes and the hierarchical distinctions between "man" and "woman" " (*The Darker Side*, 18). Taking the cue from Anibal Quijano's concept of 'coloniality of power' (which makes racial categorisation of peoples and imposes Western epistemology as universal paradigm), Maria Lugones has observed that 'the colonial/modern gender system' was "as constitutive of the coloniality of power as the coloniality of power was constitutive of it…the colonial, modern, gender system cannot exist without the coloniality of power, since the classification of the population in terms of race is a necessary condition of its possibility" ("Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 202). To study gender merely in terms of patriarchy is to miss out its deep involvement with colonial project. Resistance to the colonial imposition of gender norms entails an undermining of Western hegemony. To decolonialise gender, strategic use of non-modern, precolonial mode of gender and sexuality is needed. Baboo Nobokrishna Panda in *The Ibis Trilogy* is an embodiment of the Indian androgynous gender. Through his gender and identity Ghosh has problematised 'the colonial/modern gender system.'

The whole idea of colonial exploration, expansion and subordination is deeply underpinned by metaphor of sexuality and gender. Gendered images of Africa and America were constructed and circulated by colonial writings from post-medieval period to make these places available for penetration, possession, plunder and domination. Native women were stereotyped as possessing demonic, insatiable sexuality. Conrad's depiction of Kurtz's African mistress amply demonstrates this. In case of Asia, as Asian women were always lavishly dressed and the monarchs were gorgeous, the colonial trope of land as women to be deflowered did not fit well. Rather, as Ania Loomba argues, Europeans were mere supplicants before the powerful rulers of Asia during the Renaissance. As a result, gradually

colonialism adopted alternative "discursive strategies" for Asian countries. "The Oriental male was," writes Loomba, "effiminised, portrayed as homosexual, or else depicted as a lusty villain from whom the virile but courteous European could rescue the native (or the European) woman" (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 129). The image of "virile but courteous European" men would be very crucial in defining the identity of modern man. Another result of the ascension of masculinist ideology vis-à-vis colonialism is that, it "eroded many matrilineal or woman-friendly cultures and practices" (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 141). That is what the British did in India; they discredited the androgynous traits of Indian culture, and enforced violent ideology of masculinity in its place.

Gender has been a contested site in modernity. Gender is no longer viewed as innocent categories with eternal, unchanging role and identity in terms of male and female. With the rise of Gender Studies in the second half of the twentieth century, 'sex' is designated as biological whereas 'gender' is viewed as the social construction of sex. In *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Feminity* (1968) Robert J. Stoller argues that a person's physical sexual attributes may not correspond with his/her mental and sexual disposition, with the result that a physically strong male may desire another male or a female may desire another female. By "gender" he means "tremendous areas of behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations" (qtd. in Glover and Kaplan, xx). Biology as a determiner of gender is no longer tenable.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler has postulated that gender is a kind of performance. To be male or female, one has to perform certain roles fixed by patriarchal society. She insists that it is not biological essentialism that determines gender identity of a person; rather it is the person's deed that determines his/her gender identity. Butler has espoused the notion of "performativity" of gender. According to

her, gender is not something given; rather, one has to acquire it by performing certain roles. Butler makes an important distinction between "performance" and "performativity." Whereas the former presupposes the existence of a subject, the latter denies the preexistence of any subject behind the act; rather, performativity is something which brings into being the subject. For Butler, gender is something artificial in that there is no necessary correspondence between one's body and one's gender. She views any sort of essentialism such as 'man,' 'woman,' 'male,' 'female' to be discursive constructs which are highly undemocratic because individuals are forced to fit themselves into these categories though their reality may be different. She advocates to contest such final assertions as well as to dismantle "heterosexual matrix of power" by doing gender differently (*Gender Trouble*, 30). In performing gender, one has to reinterpret the established gender norms and therefore to effect a renewal of one's cultural history. In the article "Variation on Sex and Gender" Butler writes:

> To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms." (qtd. in Sarah Salih, 46-7)

In Butler's conception, performing gender has the potential to bring in silent revolution. And for such things to happen, she looks at gender from genealogical perspective. Instead of going into the origin of gender, she takes gender as an effect which brings into being the subject. Such a subject questions the basic categories and norms of 'the colonial/modern gender system.'

The rise of European modernity and the rise of colonial gender system are contemporaneous as well as complementary. In *The Image of Man: The creation of Modern Masculinit*y (1996), George. L. Mosse contends that with the advent of modern age, that is, the rise of the bourgeoisie from the mid-eighteenth century, specific images of masculinity

came into existence, and were consolidated in the nineteenth century. These images created the notion of "manly ideals" which every man was expected to pursue and exemplify in his life. These aspects permeated every domain of modern society, shaping and defining it, and in turn getting defined by it. The manly ideals put too much importance on power, honour and courage, and invoked the distinction between man and woman. As human beings were seen on the basis of utility with the rise of bourgeois values, masculinity became closely tied with aspiration of society, emphasising the cultivation of perfect body.

Modern masculinity played and still plays pivotal roles in determining a country's ideological and political commitment. In the context of colonialism, masculinity was one of the crucial factors in marking out the colonial difference. The British Empire, for example, is often deemed as a masculine achievement. Colonial narratives show that the modern empires had been founded and protected by European men who are to be contrasted with African and Asian men who are portrayed as lazy, inert, primitive, lacking self-cultivation and degenerate. Mosse notes that "empires, such as the British Empire, were exceedingly masculine affairs" (*The Image of Man* 15). Thus the British Empire was based on manly ideals which constructed the image of the colonisers in contrast to the Indians: the former were strong, physically perfect, having controlled, cultivated self, thus virtuous, and the latter were weak, physically deformed, lacking self-control, and indulging in excess, and therefore degenerate. In fact, body and bodily differences have been the means through which the colonisers have othered and subjugated the colonised. Bodily differences such as colour of the skin, eyes and hair as well as bodily structure have been the basis of colonial racism. Colonialism's insistence on body for its legitimacy had generated a heightened consciousness of body both among the colonisers and the colonised. But interestingly, body has not only been a means of othering the colonised, but also a means of resistance on part of the colonised. Body is also a means to assert cultural difference on the part of the colonised, and to undermine the

dominant colonial ideology in an invisible way as well. So body is a contested arena of subjugation and defiance. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write:

> The body, too, has become then the literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled, with the weapons being in both cases the physical signs of cultural difference, veils and wigs…symbols and literal occasions of the power struggles of the dominator and dominated for possession of control and identity. Such struggles have often articulated the further intersections of race with gender and class in the construction of the colonised as subject and subaltern. (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 290)

Body, then, is a potential site to assert cultural identity in the face of colonial subordination. This chapter intends to show how the colonial gender ideology distinguishing between the male and the female body has been undermined by a colonised subject's body which features both male and female. Such androgynous body was detested by the coloniser because it posed a challenge to the modernity-backed self-definition of the coloniser.

Expectedly, heterosexuality became the norm of modern sexuality and gender. Modernity consolidated two things when it comes to gender roles: (a) Masculinity became the desired goal of middle class people who equaled bodily contour with inner virtue which is an essential component of a worthy person, (b) Male/female binary became solidly grounded, and heterosexuality became the only legitimate mode of sexual relation. Other forms of sexuality like homosexuality, bisexuality, androgyny etc. were labeled as deviant forms of sexuality, and thus illegitimate. If we look at colonialism as an extension of bourgeois enterprise, we would invariably discover that colonialism invoked the rhetoric of gender roles of modernity. The colonisers viewed the colonial project, as it has already been mentioned, as a masculine enterprise with a moral purpose. The colonisers believed that they were braving

the barbaric countries to carry the light of civilisation. Secondly, they prescribed rules for male and female, prioritising the masculine over the feminine. Mixing of the masculine and the feminine was the worst of everything to the colonisers. Thus effeminacy or androgyny was anything but acceptable to the colonisers.

Colonialism prioritises masculinity, and in following modernity, designates clear distinctions between the male and the female roles as well as the male identity and the female identity. Ashis Nandy has posited that colonialism alters the cultural priority of both the colonisers and the colonised in order to deprive the colonised of their cultural strength, and thus, to fix the rules of domination over the colonised as well as the scope of resistance from the colonised. In his nuanced discussion on the psychological impact of British colonialism in India, Nandy has shown how British colonialism has appropriated the rhetoric of masculinity to consolidate their hold in India and how Gandhi effectively resisted the colonial hegemony by refusing to fight back in the colonisers's term, and instead, did so by taking recourse to the non-modern Indian tradition of androgyny. For Gandhi, androgyny is not a deviation or weakness, but is a mode of resistance to colonial domination. That is what Amitav Ghosh has also fictionally shown in *The Ibis Trilogy*. Among the many narrative strands in the trilogy, one strand is that of Baboo Nobokrishna Panda, a Bengali Brahmin who works as a gomusta of Mr. Benjamin Burnham, an opium tycoon, and spokesman of Free Trade. Baboo Nobokrishna, an Indian male, becomes androgynous in course of his life. After the development of his androgynous self, he covertly upsets the apple cart of the colonial masters in many occasions. He defies the gender roles prescribed by colonial modernity, and invents a new, subversive and liminal self and identity. This chapter focuses on Baboo Nobokrishna Panda's transformation to show how this apparently humble, ingratiating, and too-eager-to-serve Bengali takes recourse to the Indian tradition of androgyny as well as the Bengali Bhakti tradition of *ardhanariswara* to subvert the masculinist colonial ideology of

domination. As for the Indian tradition of androgyny, I will draw from the theoretical perspectives offered by Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar, and by conjoining them with the ideas of Butler, I will explore how the non-modern form of selfhood can be a means of resisting the colonial domination.

II

Set in the third and the fourth decades of the nineteenth century against the backdrop of the First Opium War, Amitav Ghosh's *The Ibis Trilogy* incorporates many interlocking narratives. The story of Baboo Nobokrishna is really interesting because it makes us reassess our concept of gender. Baboo Nobokrishna exemplifies how gender can have so much subversive potential to decolonise the being and identity of the colonised. Though Nobokrishna became an employee of an English sahib, he was not brought up to serve an Englishman, but to take over the family lineage of priesthood in the famous temple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Nadia. In fact, one of his forefathers, eleven generation back, was a disciple of Sri Chaitanya. But his life took a decisive turn when, at the age of fourteen, he became a disciple of his widowed aunt Taramony, a devotee of Lord Krishna. He had felt carnal desire for his aunt while accompanying her to Vrindavan. Being a Vaishnavite, he interprets his unholy desire for her as a mundane version of her love for Lord Krishna. Young Nobokrishna felt guilty, and surrendered himself to her, imploring her to free him from the bondage of impure desire by giving him proper tutelage. She declared that her only lover is Lord Krishna, and promised to guide him. He assured her that his devotion to her would be spiritual, like that of her devotion to Krishna or like that of Sri Chaitanya's to Krishna. Thus he became a devotee of her, and started to address her as 'Ma.' Instead of going to Vrindavan, they returned to Calcutta where Taramony soon attracted a good number

of devotees. Under the instruction of his aunt, Nobokrishna searched for a job not merely to meet their daily expenses but also to build a temple in future.

Nobokrishna looked for employment in the city. Given his intelligence and shrewdness, it did not take him long to learn the ways of the world. He learned English very quickly, and after working in a few English firms, found employment under Mr. Burnham. He was much liked by his employers for his efficiency, but more importantly for his willingness to please his master and for his inordinate capacity to digest insult. They would often abusively call him "dung-brained gubberhead," or compare his face with a monkey's asshole. Only when he was physically hit with a shoe or a paperweight thrown by his sahib employer, he felt little disconcerted not merely for physical pain but also for the inconvenient ritual of washing and bathing. Mr. Burnham was a very good employer to him because, though Mr. Burnham often called him as "my Nut-Kissing Baboon", and addressed him as Baboo Nob Kissin, he never beat him or insulted him in public by calling him "baboon." Nobokrishna rather thought that "baboon" is nothing other than an incarnation of Lord Hanuman. Nobokrishna's ingratiating attitude apparently made him the perfect employee of the colonial master. The abusive manner in which the English sahibs addressed him amply shows how the British thought Indians to be primitive, not fully-developed human beings. Whatever, in the racially disparaging vocabulary of the colonial masters, Baboo Nobokrishna Panda became Baboo Nob Kissin Pander. Interestingly, Baboo Nobokrishna adapted himself, apparently though, to make him best serviceable to the colonial masters. He performed his duty with immaculate perfection, even bringing wonderful business plans, and soon won the confidence of Mr. Burnham. He even liked to speak in English rather than in Bengali. In personal life, he remained a celibate and intense devotee of Taramony.

But this gentle, humble, effeminate Bengali becomes a different person after the death of his aunt. Almost after twenty years of their stay in Calcutta, Ma Taramony fell seriously

ill. Nobokrishna nursed her with utmost devotion but found his devotion incapable to cure her. Nobokrishna implored her not to leave him; but his aunt assured him that she would not abandon him, even after her death. She promised to return to his body:

> You must prepare yourself—for your body will be the vessel for my return. There will come a day when my spirit will manifest itself in you, and then the two of us, united in Krishna's love, will achieve the most perfect union—you will become Taramony. (*Sea of Poppies*, 165)

She instructed him that there would be signs of her return, and he must be watchful not to miss the signs, and he must follow the signs wherever they take him, even across the seas. He worked hard and waited for the signs. But as the tenth anniversary of her death was coming, in frustration and in desperation, he felt certain that the signs would surely manifest soon. Just then he met Zachary Reid, the mulatto sailor employed in the Ibis. Baboo Nobokrishna instinctively took him to be the latest incarnation of Lord Krishna. He felt certain when he discovered the entry "black" against Zachary's name in the crew's original manifest. With this conviction starts Baboo Nobokrishna's transformation from a male to male-female-combined-in-one-body. He feels Ma Taramony's spirit pouring into him. To be consistent with the inner transformations, he starts to wear Taramony's alkhalla, loosen his hair to fall upon his shoulder, wear jewelry and to do make up like a woman. Like a woman, he decides to grow his hair up to his waist. Soon his breasts start to swell, and his total gait gets changed. When this changed Nobokrishna appears before Mr. Burnham, he is severely rebuked by the surprised colonial master for violating the gender norms so much valued by colonialism and modernity:

> 'What on earth has become of you? You look so…'
>
> 'Yes, sir?'

> ‘So strangely womanish.’
>
> The gomusta smiled wanly. ‘Oh no, sir,’ he said. ‘It is outward appearance only—just illusions. Underneath all is same-same.’
>
> ‘illusion? Said Mr. Burnham scornfully. ‘Man and woman? *God made them both as they were, Baboon, and there’s nothing illusory either, nor is there anything in between.*’ (*Sea of Poppies*, 212-3) [emphases added]

This is the essence of sexual ordering of colonial modernity which eschews ‘illusions’ and brings everything within the cognitive boundary of rationality. Mr. Burnham’s attitude also indicates how racism and modernity underpin ‘the colonial/modern gender system.’ However, with the “momentous transformations” towards androgyny that were taking place inside him, Baboo Nobokrishina’s consciousness also changes, and he starts to look at the world through a different lens. The more he becomes androgynous, the more he becomes sympathetic to the distressed, and in extending his motherly protection to the downtrodden, he defies and subverts colonial ideology, both in gnosis and praxis.

In following the signs, Baboo Nobokrishna manages to become the supercargo of Ibis. Once he rejects his masculine self, he is not afraid to lose his caste by crossing the Black Water or the Kaala Pani, and visiting to a distant island with low-caste people. On the ship he sees the pathetic and inhuman treatment of Raja Neel Rattan Halder, the deposed zaminder of Raskhali estate, who has been convicted with forgery by the British law. Seeing the fallen state of Neel, a flood of maternal feeling surges in Baboo Nobokrishna. He reckons that the rise of motherhood in him is for nothing but the presence of Ma Taramony. He deems Neel as the unborn child of Ma Taramony. Interestingly, it is this Nobokrishna who had once given Mr. Burnham the idea of acquiring the Rashkhali estate; but he did so to teach the haughty, bigoted, degenerate zaminder a lesson for the latter’s mocking attitude to ordinary men and to

the "heterodox Vaishnavites like himself" (*Sea of Poppies*, 216). But after his transformation, this Nobokrishna takes up the cudgels in favour of Neel against the panoptic surveillance of colonialism, braving serious dangers threatening his career and life.

The more Ma Taramony's presence becomes palpable in him, the more he feels an irresistible urge to protect Neel just as a mother rushes to enfold her child when it is in danger. On seeing Subedar Bhyro Singh ruthlessly beating Neel on deck, Nobokrishna has to struggle with himself in restraining him from running to Neel and to enfold him in motherly protection. With the passing of days, Ma Taramony became so real in him that he feels his body to be a wrapping of a cocoon, to be discarded soon for the exposure of the new being pulsating inside him. By then, his bodily changes have become very prominent, with developed breasts and softer voice. He becomes an object of ridicule and abuse of the crew, both Western and Indian. But he never reacts, and instead, focuses his attention on the victims of colonialism, especially upon Neel. He feels the unstoppable urge of a mother to see the child when it is in pain. In fact, there would often be conflict in him between Baboo Nob Kissin the gomusta and Baboo Nobokrishna the mother. As the gomusta of a colonial master, it is unseemly for him to sympathise with the victims of colonialism but Ma Taramony in him would insist otherwise. When Mr. Crowle and Subedar Bhyro Singh trick Aa Fatt in urinating upon Neel merely for fun, Nobokrishna could not restrain himself any more. He manages to visit the cell of the two convicts in his capacity as the supercargo of the ship, and secretly gives them a good amount of food. At the cell, he smells nauseating smell of the two convicts' stool and urine stored in one bucket, but he overcomes it easily just as a mother does not feel any nausea at her child's urine and stool. So his motherly feeling is all pervasive—loving and caring, not merely protective. Surprised as Neel was, he wants to know the reason of the gomusta's profound love for him, and Nobokrishna immediately replies that he is only the vessel of Ma Taramony who has sent everything. Neel rightly

recognises that "there was something at work within this strange man that was out of the ordinary" (*Sea of Poppies*, 466). Then this extraordinary man does the most extraordinary thing to liberate the convicts from the bondage imposed upon them by colonialism. As the different incidents lead towards mutiny on the ship, and a powerful storm hits the ship at night in the midst of ocean, he gives the convicts the key to unlock the cell and escape from the ship. But even in the climatic moment of giving the key to Neel, Baboo Nobokrishna asks Neel if he sees Ma Taramony in his eyes. As stupefied Neel nods in approval, Baboo Nobokrishna is filled with ecstatic joy. He perceives that it is the time to throw away his old self, and to enter into his new self. This new self is androgynous, and encompasses empathy for all suffering humanity. Ghosh describes Nobokrishns's journey to new self thus:

> Now that Taramony's presence was fully manifest in him, it was as if he had become the key that could unlock the cages that imprisoned everyone, all these beings who were ensnared by the illusory differences of the world. It was the fullness of this insight that carried him, drenched and battered, but ecstatic in possession of his new self, towards the after-cabins. (*Sea of Poppies*, 503)

The new self defies the differences of the world, and in a sense, is transcultural in extending its protective sympathy. His new self is potentially subversive as it fights to liberate the unjustly imprisoned. The ecstasy he feels may be the ecstasy of liberation— of its own and that of others.

Baboo Nobokrishna's subversive acts against the colonial authority do not end here. In Canton he meets the disguised Neel after one year, and without recognising him, narrates to him how he felt motherly compassion for Neel. He confides to Neel that he is not what he seems to be, but hidden under it is another persona, who is none other than Radha, the gopi

"who played with cows and made butter for the butter-thieving Lord" (*River of Smoke*, 396). He also tells Neel that out of his sorrow for his supposedly lost child, he visited Neel's wife and son in Calcutta. After Neel discloses his identity, he promises not to reveal his presence to Mr. Burnham, and also to help him in every possible way. Neel thinks that this inexplicable man is a kind of protective deity of him against colonial machinery which has deposed, criminalised, and crushed him. Later, he manages to bring Neel's son to China by employing the boy as a servant of Zachary. It is because of him Neel happens to meet his son in China. He also introduces poor Zachary to the world of opium trade in order to make him a rich sahib. With Zachary's success in the capitalistic world and with the start of the Opium War, he predicts that apocalypse is not far away. Seeing the massive destruction on the Chinese side caused by modern weapons of the British, he philosophises that in this Kaliyug the British will destroy the world, and that he has played his role, small though, in advancing the pralay, the end. The fire of war is symbol of the "demons of greed that are hidden inside all human beings. That is why the English have come to China and to Hindustan." (*Flood of Fire*, 509). This is the ultimate critique of colonialism. Beneath the rhetoric of modernity and progress lies the demon of greed who consumes everything.

III

In my reading, Baboo Nobokrishna's transformation into an androgynous being is not an isolated phenomenon, but something symptomatic of Indian culture. In *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* Ashis Nandy postulates that colonialism is ultimately a psychological state of domination. Colonialism functions by altering the cultural priorities of both the coloniser and the colonised by foregrounding certain recessive traits, and relegating to background certain prevalent traits of the culture of

both sides. As for British colonialism in India, it operated on the principle of prioritising masculinity over feminity. Edward Said has already pointed out in *Orientalism* that colonialism functions by making gendered assumptions about the West and the East. As per the colonial ethos, only European men were supposed to be strong, brave and adventurous, quite in contrast to the Eastern men who were childish and effeminate. Moreover, "the East as a whole is 'feminised', deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting; while the West becomes 'masculine'—that is, active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic" (McLeod, 45). According to Nandy, in India proper colonialism began almost after seventy five years of British rule, only in the 1830s when many Indians accepted colonialism's sexual stereotype of the virile ruler and the effeminate ruled, and started to emulate the British in all spheres, political resistance included. Thus, they started to believe that their emancipation can only be achieved in becoming virile and martial like the British. Herein lies the reason of the renewed importance of Kshatriyahood in the nineteenth century India. The ethos of violence behind many anti-colonial movements evidences the new-found importance of the trait of masculinity embedded in Kshatriyahood.[1]

Nandy describes the paradigmatic shift in consciousness of Indians through the shifting importance of three terms: *purusatva* (the essence of masculinity), *naritva* (the essence of feminity) and *klibatva* (the essence of hermaphroditism). In India, *purusatva* has been viewed as the opposite of *naritva* for ages. But with the internalisation of the colonial ethos of masculinity, *purusatva* became the opposite of *klibatva.* In other words, *klibatva* or hermaphroditism now became the ultimate negative, almost evil. Nandy writes, "feminity in masculinity was now perceived as the final negation of a man's political identity, a pathology more dangerous than feminity itself" (*The Intimate Enemy,* 8). He admits that India has its own notion of good and bad androgyny, but under colonial ideology all forms of androgyny were dubbed as despicable. One of the reasons, thinks Nandy, for the failure of many pre-

Gandhian violent anti-colonial movements is that these battles were lost before they even started. Only Gandhi refused to fight against the British in the terms of masculinity preordained by the British; he took recourse to the androgynous model of resistance. Gandhi's strategy was to give the gender order of colonialism a new twist by reordering the *purusatva>naritva>klibatva* (that is masculinity is superior to feminity, and feminity is superior to androgyny) model into the model of

$$androgyny > \begin{matrix} purustva \\ naritva \end{matrix}$$

which implies that the "manliness and womanliness are equal, but the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy is superior to both" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 59). Gandhi's rejection of the values of colonialism and modernity is his psychological strategy to fight against the British not in terms of the British, but in terms of his own.

In Ghosh's representation, Baboo Nobokrishna Panda uses the same strategy to resist colonial hegemony in micro level what Gandhi did in macro level a century later. His androgynous self is not only involved in mysticism, but also in subversive political acts. Only after becoming androgynous, he dismantles the gender binary enforced by colonial modernity. His motherly feeling is symbolic of the reinstatement of matrilineal Indian culture. The presence of feminity in his male body is a subversion of the idea of man enshrined in modern masculinity's self-image. This subversion is not necessarily an inversion of the self-image of a modern man but is an alternative self-image which is discredited by 'the colonial/modern gender system.' To be the opposite of the ideal masculine body is actually a submission to the underlying principle of categorisation inherent in modernity. His is the body which, instead of being an object of categorisation and subjugation, turns out to be a subject in its own right. In fact, one of the greatest fears of the colonisers was that the

colonised may refuse to fall under the categories fixed by them. That is what Baboo Nobokrishna does. Instead of fitting himself into the category of either male or female as the colonial master would have liked to see, he appropriates the Indian notion of *ardhanariswara*, that is, the combination of male and female. This *ardhanariswara* or androgynous being is a positive entity, as is evident in the expansion of his consciousness. Nobokrishna's transcendence of male/female binary is emblematic of the Indian culture itself. The notion of *ardhanariswara* abounds in Indian culture. In an interview with Mushtaq ur Rasool Bilal, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan in 2014, Ashis Nandy opines that the real strength of Indian culture is the tradition of androgyny:

> Our concept of masculinity is a colonial product. There is also a so-called distinction with respect to martial races and non-martial races. Bengalis and Gujaratis are considered non-masculine and it was Bengalis and Gujaratis who became a real pain for the colonial state. Bengalis were termed as non-masculine but the revolution started in Bengal first. A revolution full of assassinations, killings and violence. Gujaratis were called nonmasculine and look at the riots which took place there. This is all 'masculine'…Our masculinity was always of the androgynous kind…In classical Hinduism, in [the] Vedas and Upanishads, masculinity is defined in feminine terms. That a king is to a Brahman what a wife is to a husband. So, a non-martial Brahman is the husband and the martial Kshatriya is the wife. This kind of thing has profound philosophical implications…But our androgynous construct is no longer androgynous. When I talk about alteration of cultural priorities this is what I mean by it. The standard Western concept of masculinity has taken over our concept of androgyny and we regard it as a normal thing. ("An Interview with Ashis Nandy," 730-31)

What Nandi emphasises is that in Indian culture, androgyny was not weak or deviant; it has been deemed as an anomaly only after the British imposed 'the colonial/modern gender system.' Masculinity has been normalised in India because of the acceptance of colonial epistemology by Indians. In the same interview Nandi further asserts that India's age-old culture is matrilineal: "Shakti is the goddess of power" (("An Interview with Ashis Nandy," 731). Mother is the ultimate source of power not only in the puranas, but also in household sphere. Shakti goddesses like Durga, Kali are worshipped as *shkati rupena sangsthitay*, that is, they are the form of energy. Every Indian child grows up under the all-protective network of motherly figures including mother, aunt, grandmother, sister etc. I will return to this point a little later. In Nandy's view, colonialism can only be overthrown when the colonised will refuse to accept and use the colonial categories, frames of reference and ultimately, Western modernity itself. One of the important ways to decolonise the mind and body of the colonised is to be cognisant of non-Western, diverse and contesting modernities as well as to bring to the fore non-modern forms of selfhood and identity. In case of colonial imposition of gender categories and roles, understanding "the place of gender in precolonial societies is pivotal to understanding the nature and scope of changes in the social structure that the processes constituting colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism imposed" (Lugones, 201). *Ardhanariswara,* which has strong reverberations in Indian culture since ancient times, seems to have the potential to resist the colonial imposition of gender.

That androgyny is one of the essential aspects of India is suggested by other theorists also. In *Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India* (2016) Tutun Mukherjee and Niladri R. Chatterjee refer to innumerable examples of androgynous being in Indian puranas. In Vedas and Upanishads, the Supreme Self "transcends individuating characteristics and is beyond all limitations and differentiating qualifications" (*Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India,* 18). *Ardhanariswara* represents the fusion of Shiva and Parvati,

symbolising the unification of man and nature, the male and the female energies in the universe. Interestingly, androgynous figures have been seen in India as figures of "fertility and bounty" (*Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India*, 19). Apart from the myths, *ardhanariswara* is the central feature in Vaishnavism or the Bhakti movement of medieval period. Mukherjee and Chatterjee remark that "in Vaishnavism, feminity or Radha-*bhav* is the highest attainable condition, and cannot be generalized as homoeroticism or homosexuality" (*Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India*, 25). As for example, they refer to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a sixteenth century sannyasi, who is supposed to be an embodiment of Radha-bhav. Sri Chaitanya is looked upon by his followers as an incarnation of Lord Krishna, but in the spirit of Radha. It is well known that Sri Chaitanya initiated many social reforms, most notably in fighting against the caste system. His revolutionary activities were not conducted in violent, masculinist ways, but in the feminine way spreading the message of love. In fact, he is one of the most remarkable unmanly men in India. His androgynous self was the ultimate source of his magical power as it had been with Indian gods whose female partner is looked as "shakti" (that is, power), though "shakti itself is genderless" (*Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India*, 19). That is why we get the names like RadhaKrishna, SitaRama etc. In fact, the followers of the Bhakti Cult of Bengal sought to achieve, through their devotion, the union between the microcosmic soul (i.e. the jeevatman) and the macrocosmic soul (i.e. the paramatman). The male devotees often reject their masculinity and decorate themselves as female, to be identified with sakhi, that is, the companion of Radha, Krishna's beloved. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Ramkrishna are remarkable exponents of this tradition. Alka Pande observed in her article "Ardhanariswara" that androgyny is the central component of the Bhakti tradition:

> What is interesting to note that unlike other religious orders where the male gender is considered essential for liberation from the cycle of life, the order of

> sakhis insists on rejecting male identity to break free from material reality and merge with the divine. (*Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India*, 52)

Baboo Nobokrishna's activities are invariably imbued with the spirit of the Bhakti movement. He was a devout follower of Sri Chaitanya; in fact, he was groomed to be a priest in the famous Sri Chaitanya temple in Nadia. Nobokrishna's transcendence of male/female gender division has its genesis in the Vaishnavite tradition. In *The Mystic and The Analyst* Sudhir Kakar posits that, in Vaishnavism, it is the male sexual desire which creates the biggest barrier in mystical experiencing. The presence of the father, whether literal or symbolic through the patriarchal underpinning of society, is crucial in formation of male ego. The mystic must transcend the phallic desire to achieve a fusion with the Supreme Spirit. Thus rejection of masculinity and nurturing of feminity irrespective of biological male/female become central components of Vaishnavism. That is what Nobokrishna does. He transforms his incestuous desire into spiritualism, into his unfailing devotion to Taramony, calling her as "Ma." It is enticing to view the transformation of his carnal desire into an intense spiritual quest as a classic case of Freudian Sublimation. But I prefer to study this character from the Indian perspective. In India, males grow up under all-surrounding, protective presence of females. Mother, grandmother, aunt, sisters always act as protective spirits in the life of every Indian male. In *Exploring Indian Sexuality* Kakar contends that one of the most dominant narratives of Indian culture is that of Devi or the Mother who occupies an important place in the inner life of each Hindu boy. Kakar also posits that myths are all pervasive presence in the lives of Indians. In fact, ancient myths are very much alive, and they exert symbolic influence upon individuals. As a result of the omnipresence of mother in the Indian male psyche, an Indian male's sexual relation with any woman gets hampered to a great extent as the male views all women as extension of mother.[2] To avoid the uneasiness of mother-son relation, many Indian males fantasise to become woman. "The wish to be a woman," writes

Kakar, "is one particular solution to the discord that threatens the breaking up of the son's fantasized connection to the mother, a solution whose access to awareness is facilitated by the culture's views on sexual differentiation and the permeability of gender boundaries" (*Exploring Indian Sexuality*, 134). It is the Indian culture which sanctions gender crossing. Taramony is, to Baboo Nobokrishna, both a Devi or the Mahamaya and mother. She is the ultimate symbol of *shakti* or energy. With his intuition of Ma Taramony's presence in him, he achieves Radha-bhav, both the protective mother of Neel, and the playful gopi of Zachary, the Krishna. His Radha-bhav started at the very moment he tells Taramony at the beginning of their new life: "*You* will be my Krishna and I will be your Radha" (*Sea of Poppies*, 162).This is the first indication of his immersion in the world of myth. He might be living in the nineteenth century, in the heyday of Western modernity, but he is an Indian, deeply embedded in its pluralistic, non-violent androgynous tradition. "India is not non-West; it is India," said Nandy (*The intimate Enemy*, 73). It is the India which is neither "pre-modern nor anti-modern" but simply "non-modern" which has survived the Western onslaught, and because of its pluralistic, assimilative capacity, also "co-exists with the India of the modernists" (*The intimate Enemy*, 74). Colonialism tried to replace the Indian self-image with that of one which is what the West is not, and which is essentially an Orientalist construction. It also allowed a certain degree of transgression of that image. Colonialism can never be successful in long term if it does not appropriate the terms of transgression of the colonised.

In India the colonial discourse preaching cultural segregation is bound to be less effective because India has the potential to dismantle the binaries constructed by colonialism. Besides, India has a strange capacity to assimilate everything, cultural intrusion included. If there is an Indian subculture which identifies itself with modernity and hence with masculinist ideology of the coloniser, then the mainstream Indian culture is something which

absorbs everything, the West itself with all its theories of modernity and progress. It is this soaking power of India which takes in the pain of colonial domination and the precepts of modernity without losing its non-modern "ethnic universalism" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 75). In fact, the "absolute rejection of the West," thinks Nandy, "is also the rejection of the basic configuration of Indian traditions" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 75). It is the uniqueness of non-modern India to absorb all sorts of culture— colonial experience and the immense suffering caused by it included—in its synergic frame, and to form out of it " a mature, more contemporary, more self-critical version of Indian traditions" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 75). This explains how Baboo Nobokrishna can learn and use English without being subservient to the English culture, how he can be so humble to the colonial master yet so subversive to colonial ideology. Nobokrishna's submissiveness in front of the colonial masters and his reverence for English language do not guarantee that his values would also be subservient to the colonial master. He may appear to be very servile and obedient to Mr. Burnham, but actually he is a feisty, spirited Indian who knows how to utilise one's cultural resources to resist colonial subjugation. His wonderful capacity of tolerance is representative of Indian tolerance. His obeisance is not his weakness, but his strength to defeat the colonisers in their own game. While the colonial masters thought that Baboo Nob Kissin is a very obedient, passive, ideal subject, the subject himself knows that he has made the coloniser's language and frames of reference his own, and that he has brought the coloniser within the frame of reference of his own culture.

Modern worldview has reduced India into two categories — either spiritual or material. This one dimensional representation of India became prominent with the advent of colonialism. The colonisers looked upon Indians either as exceedingly materialistic (shrewd, corrupt, money-minded etc.) or as too much spiritual (unworldly, passive, immersed in myth etc.), thus inefficient to govern themselves in the age of modern science and technology.

Spiritual gurus interpret India as essentially a spiritual entity and opposite of the materialistic West; but these spiritual leaders sell this idea of mystical India into the West through the technical innovations of modernity. On the other side, there are modern writers like Nirad C. Chaudhury and V. S. Naipaul who hate and discredit spiritual India and plead for materialistic, virulent India as the true India. Nandy thinks that this compartmentalised representation of India is itself one of the detrimental effects of modernity's ethos of reducing everything into absolute, oppositional categories. An ordinary Indian is not bothered whether India is material or spiritual. The reality of India is that in it mutually coexist "a plurality of ideologies" in a "single life style" (Nandy, 82). India is an amalgamation of multiple traits. It retains its cultural uniqueness from the invasion of modernity by innovative self-protection:

> It has been forced to cultivate the creative self-protection which the victims often show when faced with an inescapable situation: a slightly comical imitativeness which indirectly reveals the ridiculousness of the powerful; an instrumental use of the ways of the powerful, which overtly grants their superiority yet denies their culture (this may involve the rejection of values such as work, productivity, masculinity, maturity or adulthood, rationality and normality); an uncanny ability to subvert the valued skills or traits which may ensure one's adaptation to the 'system' (such as intelligence, creativity, achievement, adjustment, personal growth or development); an over-done obsequiousness which indirectly seeks to limit the options of the target of ingratiation; and a stylized other-worldliness which can disarm at least those who see it as a denial of self-interest. (*The Intimate Enemy*, 84)

Thus Indians may appear comical to the racist colonisers, but their comicality may be a strategy to defy colonial subordination. Baboo Nobokrishna's comic appearance, his spiritualism, his shrewdness, his foresight in business deal, his obsequiousness and his

gender-crossing do explain that these are parts of the creative protection of his self against the all-engrossing ideology of colonial modernity. Mr. Burnham may like to reduce him either to a male or a female, or may think him as a monkey, but he is ultimately uncategorisable in terms of modernity. His calmness, his servility, his mastery over English, and his androgyny are indications of mutual cohabitation of multiple traits in him. It is this multiplicity which ultimately enables him to fashion a new self against the oppressive, regimented system of colonialism.

Baboo Nobokrishna's strategy against the British is ultimately a psychological strategy. The apparent passivity and non-violence of Indians do not ensure that they are really subjugated by the coloniser. Nandy thinks that violent opposition to the coloniser is unavoidably a psychological defeat. Staying outside the cognitive boundary of the coloniser is an important step towards decolonisation. Nandy writes:

> Seemingly, he makes all-round compromises, but he refuses to be psychologically swamped, co-opted, or penetrated. Defeat, his response seems to say, is a disaster and so are the imposed ways of the victor. But worse is the loss of one's 'soul' and the internalization of one's victor, because it forces one to fight the victor according to the victor's values, within his model of dissent. Better to be a comical dissenter than to be a powerful, serious but acceptable opponent. Better to be a hated enemy, declared unworthy of any respect whatsoever, than to be a proper opponent, constantly making 'primary adjustments' to the system. (*The Intimate Enemy*, 111)

It is in this light that one can understand why Nandy proclaims that all Indian heroes are androgynous. It is in this light that we can appreciate the womanly man Baboo Nobokrishna as an unheroic hero. The androgyny of Indians seems to be a part of their creative self-

protection. Baboo Nobokrishna's transgression of gender norms imposed by colonialism and modernity is, most probably, his passive, effeminate strategy to protect the deepest core of his faith. The reason why he is never taken seriously by the colonisers is that he never overplays his autonomy. He is mocked and abused; he is made the butt of ridicule for his feminine manner but he hardly reacts in anger, let alone violent protest. Rather he employs his androgyny for silent upheavals. He never fights against the colonisers in accordance with the values of the colonisers. Thus, without being a worthy opponent, he achieves tremendous success. Apparently, he easily fits into the racism-inflicted colonial category of effeminate men. He seems to be the very opposite of the image of a modern man. But his non-modern, androgynous self is actually a camouflage to dismantle colonial subordination.

Though it cannot be said with certainty that Ghosh has modeled Baboo Nobokrishna on any particular historical or religious figure, it is likely that Baboo Nobokrishna shares some of the dispositions of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Aurobindo and of course, Mahatma Gandhi. Himself a Vaishnavite, his Radha-bhav can be said to be the manifestation of spiritual tradition established by Sri Chaitanya. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who was educated in England and was groomed in English values, reinstated his Indian self (deeply mystical, feminine, all-encompassing), but without totally disowning his Western self. He gradually develops a universal consciousness incorporating both the East and the West. Throughout his life, he wrote in English to express his creative self. As a victim, his response to colonial oppression was in line with his Indianness. He protected his humanity by not seeing the coloniser as an object as the coloniser saw him. He assimilated, in the vein of Indian culture itself, the Western ethos, and made it his own. He developed a model of universal emancipation that concerns entire humanity, not any particular race. Baboo Nobokrishna never saw Western culture as an antithesis of Indian culture. Rather, his working for the British colonialism and at the same time working against it explain his

inherent Indianness which would identify and counter-identify with the West. Like Sri Aurobindo, his mysticism has a pragmatic side after all. Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal into intense spiritualism may seem escapism or irrational to modern minds, but it was his way of affirming his Indianness in the hard, masculine colonial world. Defiance has not to be always overt, antithetical and violent. It is a defiance which refuses to accept the popular antonyms as opposites as propagated by modernity, and so much valued by colonialism. Antonyms are required for legitimising organised oppression. Nobokrishna's androgyny is also a gesture of defiance against categorisation, and his sympathy for the victims of colonialism, irrespective of caste, class, race and religion, does indicate his universal sympathy, very much in keeping with the Indian tradition. The holistic view of human existence is actually deeply embedded in Indian cosmology. When one is the victim of "hyper-masculinity, adulthood, historicism, objectivism and hyper-normality", the most effective way to preserve one's self-esteem is, perhaps, both to conform to the stereotype constructed by the coloniser, and also to nurture "a secret defiance" against it (*The intimate Enemy*, 100). This is most famously done by Gandhi (1869-1948) who recognised that colonialism seeks its psychological validation in morality and in the historical role it claims to play in ushering in progress in the colonised country. Gandhi mounted his critique of colonialism on two grounds: Firstly, he exposes the immorality of colonialism by showing how its violent, masculinist ethos violated the core tenets of Christianity; secondly, he rejected modernity with all its emphasis on categories, history, reason, progress etc. Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence is premised upon the androgynous tradition of India. He never fought against the British in the violent manner imported by the coloniser. The potential of Gandhi's strategy is evident in the historical Salt March.[3] By refusing to accept the coloniser's categories, Gandhi reaffirmed an autonomous worldview. Gandhi has shown, from the perspective of non-modern Indian culture, that modernity is only one of the many worldviews available in the world. Particularly notable is

Gandhi's rejection of history which stresses the narrative of linear progress. Such history would make one's self very determinate and categorised. But Gandhi recognised that India has never nurtured such a determinate self and determinate sense of history. Rather, being a product of an amorphous and plural culture, the Indian self is compromising, fluid and willing to learn the elements of other cultures as long as they are beneficial. In other words, the Indian self is liminal and this liminality has enabled it to protect itself against enormous odds. "It is this liminality," contends Nandy, "upon which the greatest of Indian social and political leaders built their self-definition over the last two centuries" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 104). A corollary to this liminality is the rejection of history which makes a disjunction between the primitive past and the progressive present. Gandhi "rejected history and affirmed the primacy of myths over historical chronicles" (*The Intimate Enemy*, 55). For Gandhi, in India myths are permanently present, and they make the past a living reality, always available for interpretation and reinterpretation. Reinstating ahistorical myths in the place of time-oriented history is Gandhi's way of affirming autonomous selfhood. Baboo Nobkrishna's liminality (transformation into an androgynous self) and his total conviction in myth (in the belief of Zachary to be Lord Krishna'a latest avatar and Taramony to be the Mahamaya, the goddess of power) is an affirmation of his autonomous selfhood in the face of hegemonic colonial structures. He seems to be a prototype of Gandhi in combining an effective protest and a minimal gesture of protest.

Baboo Nobokrishna's firm conviction of Tarmony's presence in him shows how powerful myths are in configuring one's self and identity at present. His positive take on his being called a "baboon" (baboons are representatives of Great Hanuman) is part of the same consciousness. His firm belief that Zachary is the manifestation of the playful Krishna, and his constant search for symptoms of Krishna in Zachary may seem enigmatic and madness to a rational Western mind, but it does make sense in the Indian context. His interpretations of

colonialism as an expression of greed, and the massive destruction caused by British firing as the beginning of the apocalypse predicted to happen in Kaliyug are parts of the same consciousness. So deeply he is immersed in the living reality of myth that he feels it is duty to help the British in expediting the end of the world, as predicted to happen in Kaliyug, the last of the ages according to Indian mythology. This is India, apparently passive and easily yielding; but in reality, it is outside the boundary of the Western epistemology. In a sense, Baboo Nobokrishna'a acceptance of ahistorical, old-but-ever-present myth is a way of rejecting the linear narrative of history and rational self which are important components of modernity. Whatever, it is Baboo Nobokrishna's immersion into myth and androgyny that endows him with a new self which is non-modern and subversive to colonial hegemony. He becomes as compassionate towards the distressed as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was. His profound sympathy for Neel, Paulette, Kalua and every suffering being and his subsequent actions to liberate them from the oppressive colonial system speak volumes about how the subversion of imposed colonial gender roles can be the subversion of colonial hegemony. The journey towards his new self and identity is his journey from a subservient man to an autonomous individual. The identity imposed upon him by the coloniser as a clever but obedient, religious but primitive and educated but servile Indian gomusta seems to be undermined by his creative self-fashioning which endows him with a liminal identity. By becoming a fusion of male and female in the same body, he reaffirms his Indian self, but not necessarily in opposition to the Western self-image. He only reclaims the recessive trait of both the East and the West, that is, the trait of androgyny pushed into oblivion by violent ideology of colonialism. Instead of choosing the violent path of resistance, he chooses the feminine path enshrined in Indian worldview. His battle is ultimately psychological, and if colonialism is a psychological subordination in the last analysis, then the liberation of mind is the ultimate liberation. Paradoxically enough, he achieves autonomy of being, but without

taking recourse to the Western concept of rationality. Baboo Nobokrishna, it seems, has been able to win the psychological battle in the first place by subverting the gender identity preached and endorsed by colonialism. His acts of liberating and helping the victims of colonialism may be viewed as resulting from his own liberated self and identity. He becomes a non-modern "countertype" to the colonial gender identity; but he never proclaims that he is a countertype. His body becomes a contested site of domination and resistance. His transgression of gender norms reminds us of the distinction Stoller made between gender role and gender identity to highlight that one's inner being and outer being may be incompatible to each other. According to Stoller, gender identity is something which, while retaining an awareness of biological sex, develops and gets complicated with the possibility that "one may sense himself as not only male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even as a man who fantasies being a woman" (qtd. in Glover and Kaplan, xi). Baboo Nobokrishna's becoming an incarnation of Taramony is an example of the last possibility mentioned by Stoller. Taking the cue from Stoller, David Glover and Cora Kaplan observe that the "gender role that one plays out before others may offer little clue as to who one feels oneself to be, and consequently in Stoller's theory the very definition of gender identity is founded upon the possibility of an inner discord, a kind of non-identity with one's sexual being" (*Genders*, xxi). Baboo Nobokrishna's androgynous consciousness endows him with a gender identity that would be a sort of non-identity if aligned with his male body. One is reminded of Butler's notion of the performativity of gender in which "doing" one's gender brings into being the subject. Baboo Nobokrishna becomes a new subject who has cast off his old self and identity. As for his choice of gender is concerned, he draws from the cultural reservoir of India. Baboo Nobokrishna's doing gender differently against the backdrop of colonial hegemony dismantles both the oppressive gender division and the notion of fixed, final gender identity. Rather, Baboo Nobokrishna's transformation shows how "doing" gender

differently can make one's self liminal which is never finalised, and is always in the process of evolving anew.

The transformation of Baboo Nobokrishna's subjectivity and identity brings to our mind the notion of creative, contingent and positional cultural identity espoused by Stuart Hall. Baboo Nobokrishna exemplifies that cultural identity is never a finished product; it is a matter of becoming as well as being. Without sticking to any essentialism, he fashions his identity in a way that breaks free of the totality imposed by colonial modernity. His fluid identity undermines the universal paradigm of gender inculcated by colonial modernity. Baboo Nobokrishna embodies what Mignolo calls the 'bodypolitics of knowledge.' He uses his body to contest the imposed gender identity as well as to disrupt the smooth operations of colonialism. He also shows how an Indian can negotiate with Western modernity by effecting "our attachment to the past" ("Our Modernity, 151). The transformation of his self and identity is accomplished within "the narratives of the past" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 225). This past is not the dead past, but is very much alive to the present exigency. Baboo Nobokrishna is the embodiment of how the Indians can be the producers of their own version of modernity through the transformation of self and identity. In fact, it can be said that Baboo Nobokrishna not only shows how the Indians can create alternative modernities, but also how they can fashion alternatives to modernity.

Notes:

1. Literary texts like Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadvadh Kavya* and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* identify, metaphorically though, the reason of India's enslavement to be its descent into effeminacy from its masculine prowess in past. These texts prescribe the resurrection of masculinity as the only means of India's salvation.

2. This phenomenon is brilliantly demonstrated in *Skandapurana* in which the wayward Kartikeyya seduces the wives of gods. The helpless gods approached to Parvati, Katikeyya's mother who decides to manifest herself in every woman he desires. Kartikeyya finds his mother in every woman, and, in shame, decides to remain a celibate.

3. Nandy gives the example of Gandhi's Salt March (from 12 March 1930 to 6 April 1930) as an example of the strength of androgynous philosophy. Gandhi started the Salt March of 241 miles from Ahmedabad to Dandi on seashore under the cruel Indian sun just to pick up a pinch of salt in defiance of Salt Laws imposed by the British. This apparently childish and comic gesture of protest had massive impact on Indian freedom movement as millions of Indians started preparing salt in different parts of the country. The British violently suppressed the movement, beating, torturing, firing, and imprisoning thousands of people. The Indians suffered immensely but none of them responded in violent way. Gandhi himself was arrested, and on his release the famous Gandhi-Irwin Pact was made, with the result that the British left their "repressive measures" and released the prisoners. After that incident, the British lost their footing in India to a great extent. The incident implies that Indian non-violence is probably more effective than violence.