

Exploring Pluralistic Indian Nationalism: Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Nehru in Historical Political Thought

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Abstract

The article gives a snippet view of the pluralism of Indian nationalism by focusing on some of the critical views expounded by Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Nehru, who significantly contributed to the intellectual, social, and political spheres of India. The ideas and actions of these national heroes played a crucial role in shaping the Indian idea of nationalism and the Indian freedom struggle. Aurobindo saw militant nationalism as a spiritual principle. Vivekananda believed in *Karma*, morality, and fearlessness; he laid focus on the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* as the three primary ancient Vedanta writings, and he was an exponent of spiritual nationalism. Gandhi promoted *Swaraj* (self-rule), *Swadeshi* (native products for social development), *Swadharma* (to follow the best in our own religion), *Satyagraha* (holding fast to truth), *Sarvodaya* (upliftment of all), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Asangrah* (non-possession), *Sharirashrama* (physical labor), *Aswads* (control of palate), *Sarvatra-Bhaya-Varjana* (fearlessness), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). He upheld cultural nationalism. Nehru was inclined towards socialism. Socialism is an economic and political system that advocates for collective ownership and control of the means of production, aiming to create an egalitarian society by reducing inequalities and ensuring social welfare. The article reveals how diverse ideas inspired multi-dimensional Indian nationalism and laid the foundation of the Indian freedom struggle against the British Raj.

Keywords

Indian National Movement, Indian freedom struggle, militant nationalism, spiritual nationalism, cultural nationalism, socialist nationalism

1. Introduction

This article shows the multi-dimensionality of Indian nationalism by shedding light on the political ideas put forward by some prominent Indian leaders whose thoughts and actions played a pivotal role in the Indian National

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Movement. Four national leaders – namely Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Nehru – are referred to in this article to show how various ideologies influenced the Indian freedom struggle. This article takes us down the lane of history and reminds us that different and diverse types of nationalism, which were connected through the spirit of anti-colonialism, made the Indian National Movement inclusive and pluralistic. In the Movement, “[t]here was no homogeneity, except for the common goal. There was a critical engagement and debate but they [nationalists with different approaches and ideas] didn’t accuse the other of being antinational” (Habib 2017, 36). According to Habib, the Indian National Movement followed “an inclusive nationalism that was consciously adopted all through our freedom struggle and carried forward to build a new pluralistic India” (1).

The article is divided into seven sections, including the introductory and concluding parts. After the introduction to the article, the concept of nationalism is discussed in the Indian context, followed by four sections on the different types of nationalism embraced by the national leaders under consideration. The last part of the article sums up the findings. This article critically gives a snippet view of pluralistic, anti-colonial Indian nationalism.

2. Plurality of Nationalism in the Indian Context

Nationalism is a political and ideological belief that subscribes to loyalty, devotion, and love for one’s nation. It involves a sense of pride in the shared cultural, historical, and social characteristics of a particular group of people who identify themselves as a nation. In other words, it is a belief in a collective connectedness and belonging at the psychological level with all those people who share the same cultural beliefs, historical or mythical past, traditions, political awareness, or any other binding homogeneity. It also instills a feeling of “us” in a people against “them” – any other people.

Nationalism appears in different colors and shades: left-wing nationalism, liberal nationalism, religious nationalism, pan-nationalism, socio-political nationalism, postcolonial nationalism, expansionist nationalism, romantic nationalism, cultural nationalism, spiritual nationalism, socialist nationalism, economic nationalism, and so forth. The differences among the different kinds of nationalism lie in their means and ends. An individual’s mindset, circumstances, and personal choice may all influence their commitment to a specific type of nationalism. Keeping the wide scope of nationalism in view, Gangeya Mukherji (2010) appropriately applies the term “open texture” to nationalism.

“Nationalism could be patriotism (love and loyalty towards one’s country) or become associated with militancy and fanaticism” (Nayar 2010a, 69).

Nationalism takes its form as a result of the socio-political environment as well as cultural influences. In light of this, anti-colonial nationalism frequently takes on an exclusive and insular character. It can serve as a vehicle for racism and xenophobia. Elie Kedourie calls nationalism “a new tribalism,” where a “nation excludes outsiders and is intolerant of them” (Habib 2017, 2). Ram Punyani looks at it as a “multi-headed hydra,” and Homi K. Bhabha, keeping an ambivalent view, refers to Tom Nairen’s coinage “the modern Janus” (Biswas 2022, 1). George Orwell looked at nationalism as the practice of assuming that individuals can be categorized like insects, and that groups of millions or tens of millions of people may be categorically designated as either “good” or “bad” (2018, 1). In contrast, nationalism born out of social upheaval and demographic change tends to be a liberating force linked to the goals of liberty, justice, and democracy (Kundra 2019a, 131).

Indian nationalism against British colonialists dates back to the 19th century, when the “othering” of Indian culture as “backward” by the British was exacerbated by the disruption of India’s education system and the destruction of local industries (Biswas 2022, 219). The atrocities committed by the British against Indians in the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, as well as with discriminatory policies like Lytton’s Arms Act, the Vernacular Act, and Dalhousie’s Doctrine of Lapse, exposed colonial arrogance towards Indian people. The failure of the Ilbert Bill also showed the hypocrisy of the British claim of equal treatment (223). The Indian National Congress (INC), formed in 1885, was crucial in creating and popularizing the nationalist movement. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-1922, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-1934, and the Quit India Movement in 1942 were critical periods of the resistance.

Finally, in 1947, India gained independence, marking the conclusion of the decades of struggle against the British Raj. Sylvie Guichard posits that four elements — movement, feeling, ideology, and discourse — are linked to nationalism, and “A political movement defends an ideology with the help of a discourse, which can be used to arouse certain sentiments” (2010, 14). In a nutshell, the Indian National “Movement” politically defended the “ideology” of self-rule and sovereignty with the help of a nationalist “discourse” about freedom from discrimination¹ and exploitation by the British Raj. This discourse aroused patriotic “sentiments” among Indians and brought them together to fight against the Imperial Crown.

1 The outbreak of the famine during the British rule in India in 1943 also exposed the biased and inhuman face of the British power when Winston Churchill indignantly “ordered the diversion of food from starving Indian civilians to well-supplied British soldiers and even to top up European stockpiles in Greece and elsewhere” (Tharoor 2016, 188).

Anti-colonial nationalism in India was many-sided and pluralistic due to Indian diversity. India is a multicultural land; its identity lies in its diversity. A.K. Ramanujan is quoted as saying, “One way of defining diversity for India is to say what the Irishman is said to have said about trousers. When asked whether trousers were singular or plural, he said, ‘Singular at the top and plural at the bottom’” (quoted in Guttman 2007, 1). “Indian nationalism” may sound homogeneous, monolithic, and unidirectional because of the assumption that unifying Indianness is at the core of Indian nationalism, but “singular-at-the-top” homogeneity carries “plural-at-the-bottom” heterogeneity. It can be said that “Indian nationalism is basically Indianism which is not monolithic in character... Indianism is mainly cultural nationalism as it celebrates everything Indian and sees its rainbow-coloured culture as a unified national culture.” (B. Mohan 2023, 132). This nationalism is “inclusive,” and it reflects “the diversity and plurality of India” (Habib 2017, 4).

Sethi (1999) also speaks of the heterogeneity of the Indian National Movement: “...the nationalist intelligentsia were political figures, statesmen, and intellectuals engaged in social and political activities or reform movements to start with, without necessarily having nationalism as their primary concern... they were not identified by a homogeneity of interests or grounded in any common theory of nationalism” (4).

Thus, nationalism in the Indian context centered on a number of different activities headed in one direction during the freedom struggle. Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary leader, trod the path of militant nationalism. Gandhi followed cultural nationalism to unite the country against the colonial empire in India. His nationalism, based on cultural signs and symbols, emphasized non-violence, truth, and social justice. Mohan Dharia (2010), an eminent freedom fighter, believes that “our independence is a joint creation of both non-violent and violent struggles by our patriotic youth, both men and women” (2010, 31).

Lal-Bal-Pal’s militant nationalism challenged the western ideals. Lajpat Rai opined that the Hindus and the Muslims could coordinate with each other against the anti-colonial struggle; Bal Gangadhar Tilak aspired for the revival of India as “a self-contained country” of Vedic times; Bipan Chandra Pal dealt with nationalism at the philosophical level (Habib 2017, 13-15). Gopal Krishna Gokhale, an Indian liberal political leader and a social reformer during the Indian Independence Movement, advocated moderate and constitutional methods of agitation and gradual reform. Rabindranath Tagore’s “non-parochial inclusive nationalism” (Kundra 2019b) was against the narrow type of nationalism that would lead to the outbreak of two world wars in

the future. Aurobindo supported militant nationalism; Vivekananda stood up for the universal, humanitarian basis of nationalism. Nehruvian nationalism chiefly embodied the principles of socialism. B.R. Ambedkar's social justice nationalism envisaged a non-discriminatory society. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's composite nationalism and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's non-violent nationalism remained committed to indivisible nationalism. These leaders both questioned separatist Muslim nationalism. Dadabhai Naoroji, who was the originator of the "drain theory," embraced first economic nationalism and later political nationalism.

The development of Indian nationalism during the freedom struggle was "coextensive with the growth of Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism as religious binaries" (Biswas 2017, 7). Veer Savarkar was of the view that "nationalism was incomplete without its enemy. Indian Muslims, Christians and communists were internal enemies while the West in general was the enemy without" (Habib 2017, 12). Syed Ahmed Khan's "One Country, Two Nations" theory posited that India had two nations — the Mohammedans and the Hindus, who were culturally diametrically opposite and could not be united. On the other hand, Surendranath Banerjee's liberal nationalism denied any conflict and animosity between the "two great races who inhabit this vast continent and who together form the Indian nation" (11). Maulana Madani dwelled upon the metaphor of Medina to conceptualize a common nationhood for the Hindus and the Muslims: "Insisting Muslims could form a common nationality with Hindus just as they had done with the Jews at Medina under the Prophet, Madani summarily dismissed the Muslim League's Islamic version of Pakistan" (17). Similarly, Sarojini Naidu referred to the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* to highlight the syncretic culture of India: "The Ganga and the Jumna — a Sangam of two rivers each without losing its own characteristics and qualities. And yet it is a perfect union. And that should be the symbol of the Hindu and Muslim Unity..." (22). Maulana Azad wanted the Hindus and the Muslims to be "part of one homogeneous group which he called Ummat-i-Wahida (one nation)" (32). Nevertheless, the communal rift during the freedom struggle against the colonial ruler became one of the strongest political reasons for the division of British India into India and Pakistan.

It is impossible to categorically define any absolute and sacrosanct contours and confines of Indian nationalism in light of its variety, multidimensionality, and complexity. Several common, overlapping, and conflicting characteristics can be seen in different approaches to Indian nationalism. For example, Aurobindo's militant nationalism, Vivekananda's spiritual nationalism, and

Gandhi's cultural nationalism all derived inspiration from Hinduism, among other influences. They each have cultural as well as spiritual elements, though they are named specifically in light of their respective dominating traits. Besides, the idea of worshipping the motherland is common to Aurobindo's and Vivekananda's approaches to nationalism. Nehru "moves from an elitist view explaining Bharat Mata (Mother India) to 'ignorant' villagers who considered the soil as Bharat Mata to embracing the very same concept emotionally" (Neelakandan 2003). In 1936, a Bharat Mata (Mother India) temple, without an image of any god or goddess, was inaugurated by Gandhi, who in his address spoke about "the universal mother, not restricted to the mother that is India but the mother that is the earth" (Jha 2004, 37).

On the other hand, in Tagore's novel *The Home and the World*, Nikhil, the novelist's mouthpiece, critiques the cult of *Bande Mataram* (Worshipping the Motherland): "...I am not running amuck crying Bande Mataram" (2002, 30). It is also notable that Aurobindo and Vivekananda had different views on Westernization. Aurobindo believed that one could not overlook the transformation of modernism brought about by the European civilization, and that there should be acceptance and assimilation of those Western ideas that are compatible with the national spirit and ideals of India. Vivekanand, on the other hand, was "wary about the materialistic pursuit of life brought about by the industrial revolution in Europe and its consequent impact on the life of the Indians who were trying to emulate their colonial master" (Biswas 2022, 230). Nehru, who believed that large-scale industry was the solution to India's development problems, was unimpressed with Gandhi's rural utopia and its small-scale and locally-oriented production.

Some contradictions can also be seen within one type of nationalism. Aurobindo speaks of violent struggle as well as passive resistance; Gandhi links religion to politics and then delinks them. Vivekananda admired the Rani of Jhansi (the colonized) as well as Robert Clive (the colonizer). At one point in time, Nehru, an apostle of non-violence and peace, did acknowledge that violence might be advantageous. One approach to Indian nationalism may be in conflict with another approach to Indian nationalism; however, both of these approaches make an integral part of Indian nationalism on the whole. Radical and revolutionary nationalists saw violence as a possible means to freedom, while Gandhian nationalists promoted a non-violent form of nationalism.

Hindu nationalism and Islamic nationalism were also conspicuously different. They used their respective versions of history "to legitimize their political ideology of religion-based nationalism to endorse the political mobilization that they sought" (Habib 2017, 5). Our freedom struggle that "defined our

nationalism and culture in an inclusive way, going beyond religion, caste, language and class and even region” did “confront challenges from Hindu and Muslim essentialists who were committed to polarizing Indians around diverse identities” (7).

The pluralism of Indian nationalism seems analogous to *Anekantavada* — a Sanskrit word for a Jain philosophical idea that emphasizes a plurality of viewpoints and the acceptance of various truths, encouraging a holistic and inclusive approach to knowledge and understanding. Although the concepts of *Anekantavada* and Indian nationalism emerged in distinct contexts, they are similar in a number of ways. *Anekantavada* emphasizes that reality may be comprehended from a variety of perspectives and respects the multitude of opinions and the complexity of truth. Similarly, Indian nationalism recognizes many cultural, religious, and linguistic identities within India. Furthermore, *Anekantavada* and Indian nationalism are ideologically united by the concept of “unity in diversity.” *Anekantavada* advocates for the peaceful coexistence of various philosophical viewpoints within the Jain tradition; Indian nationalism acknowledges the coexistence of multiple groups with varied approaches and celebrates the notion of unity in diversity.

In order to give readers a fair and impartial portrayal of important personalities who had a major influence on the Indian nationalist movement, the article has carefully chosen four leaders representing distinct viewpoints and approaches. The focus on these four allows for a comprehensive yet manageable exploration of the topic within the given scope, providing a nuanced understanding of different facets of Indian nationalism.

3. Aurobindo: Militant Nationalism

Spirituality is India’s only politics and the fulfillment of the Sanatana Dharma is only *Swaraj*.

— Sri Aurobindo (Mohapatra 2009, 42)

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a multi-dimensional personality. He is known as a nationalist, freedom fighter, poet, philosopher, and yogi. After the partition of Bengal, he resigned from his job as the Vice Principal of Baroda College in the princely state of Baroda and came to Calcutta, where he became one of the leaders of the nationalist movement. “His stress on the country as a Mother and declaring with disarming frankness that complete independence was the goal of India’s national awakening had a thrilling impact on the mind of young India” (Das 2010, 37). In a lecture delivered under the auspices of the Bombay National at Mahajan Wadi, Bombay, on

19th January 1908, Aurobindo said, “Nationalism is not a mere political programme; nationalism is a religion that has come from God; nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live” (2002, 818). He was responding with sadness to current events reported in the paper *Bande Mataram*, including the judgement of the *Yugantar* trial and the prosecution of another newspaper called *The Nabasakti*. In the same lecture, he characterized nationalism as divine and immortal, with a great future. He also added that Bengal, contrary to the expectations of other “nations,”² had emerged as a savior of India after having long been known as an atheistic land of “doubters and cynics” (820) under the influence of Western intellectual traditions and manners. According to Aurobindo, the power of “belief” became the strength of Bengal, and God selected Bengali people to save India.

Aurobindo went on to say that those who rejected nationalism as “madness” (822) looked at things from a narrow intellectual standpoint; nationalism appeared “hopeless” (823) to them, as they, from their rational viewpoint, could not cope with the resistance of the British due to their lack of material strength. This intellectual standpoint had led to despair and apathy in Bengal. But when the intellect had failed, the heart of Bengal was open and ready to receive the message of God; “in a single moment the whole nation rose... Bengal found the way of salvation and declared to all India that eternal life, immortality and not lasting degradation was her fate” (825). Through suffering, Bengal’s God-bestowed strength increased. Aurobindo argued that this suffering was necessary, as “without suffering, without the lesson of selflessness, without the moral force of self-sacrifice, God within us cannot grow.”

Aurobindo believed that “[i]t is not by any mere political programme, not by National Education alone, not by Swadeshi alone, not by Boycott alone, that this country can be saved”; in his opinion, the great “idea that there is a great Power at work to help India” could save the country (826). He added that Bengali patriots made decisions guided by divine ideas; they listened to their hearts. They understood that God was doing everything; when God wanted them to suffer, they suffered because suffering gave them strength. Aurobindo said, “This movement in Bengal, this movement of Nationalism is not guided by any self-interest, not at the heart of it. Whatever there may be in some minds, it is not, at the heart of it, a political self-interest that we are pursuing. It is a religion which we are trying to live” (827).

In Aurobindo’s view, selflessness and courage were the other two names of faith. It was essential to keep in mind “that the three hundred millions of

2 Aurobindo called Bengal a nation.

people of this country are God in the Nation... something that cannot be measured by so much land, or by so much money, or by so many lives" (829).

Through different journals and newspapers, Aurobindo made "stern criticism of the British imperialism by preaching the gospel of militant nationalism" (Dash 2008, 26). He established himself as one of the radical leaders of the early 20th century, expanding Indian nationalism beyond a select group of armchair politicians and amateur liberation warriors to create a powerful mass movement (26). "Sri Aurobindo had no hesitation in using violent means to achieve his country's freedom from foreign oppression" (Singh 1963, 107).

4. Vivekananda: Spiritual Nationalism

Narendranath Dutt, popularly known as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), was a follower of Ramakrishna³ of Dakshineswar. He is considered one of the forerunners of Hindu missionary endeavors in the West, one of the architects of contemporary Hinduism, and the father of modern yoga. His contributions to Hindu nationalism and its ideology of Hindutva make him a politically significant figure (Baier 2019). He connected India's revival to her longstanding practice of spiritual pursuit and based his idea of nationalism on universalism and humanism — two essential components of Indian spirituality. He advised individuals to free themselves first from self-imposed bonds and self-inflicted suffering (Tyagi 2015). In addition to emphasizing the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* as the three primary ancient Vedanta writings, he served as a symbol of spiritual nationalism. He urged the youth of India, in particular, to emulate the fundamental principles of Vedanta in combating the various divisive influences that had become pervasive in Indian society (Yadav 2022). He believed in the philosophy of *Karma*: perform your duty with complete dedication and keep yourself detached from it at the same time.⁴ He proudly proclaimed:

I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother, say, the ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother. The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my

3 Ramakrishna believed that "[a]ll religions are true, each laying stress on one or the other aspect of Supreme Reality of the Undivided and Eternal Existence, Knowledge and Bliss... To Ramakrishna, Kali the Divine Mother, whom he worshipped as Bhavatarini in the temple at Dakshineswar built by Rani Rashmoni of Janbazar estate in Calcutta, was his living Mother and the Mother of the Universe. In the same temple compound by the side of the Ganges there were images of Krishna and Shiva, symbolizing the harmony of the Sakta, Vaishnava and Saiva doctrines" (Bose 2010, 10).

4 "For him the Absolute which comprises all Existence is unknown. The Eternal Subject can never be objectified, but it must be identical with the soul in us; otherwise from what source do we get our spirituality?" (Gupta 2001, 61).

life, India's gods and goddesses are my God. India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age. The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good. O Thou Mother of strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a Man. (1976-1979, 480)

Swami Vivekananda did not have faith in politics, and he said that he belonged as much to the world as to India. He did not “dismiss the British and the Muslim rule in India. He believed that the British rule helped in removing the exclusive privileges enjoyed by the Brahmin caste, and Muslim rule ‘came as a salvation to the downtrodden’” (Biswas 2022, 230). However, he also greatly supported the Indian freedom struggle and the rise of nationalism in India (Bose, 2010, 103). Although he did not use the word “nationality,” he was an ideal national hero. Sister Nivedita writes, “He was a worker at foundations... he was born a lover, and queen of his adoration was his Motherland. To him, the thought of India was like the air he breathed” (104). Panda calls Vivekananda “a true nationalist in heart and spirit” (2014, 31). Vivekananda's writings significantly strengthened the ethical roots of Bengali nationalism in theory and practice. He offered nationalists a sense of pride in the past through his writings and gave cultural assurance to those who had lost their sense of self-worth. Vivekananda also boldly declared that the West needed to learn a lot from India at a time when the Indian elite was busy copying Westerners (32).

Vivekananda said, “In each nation, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme, everything else is secondary. India's theme is religion. Social reforms and everything else are secondary”⁵ (Panda 2014, 31). He opined that the future of India was not in the material pursuit of power but rather in its spiritual revival and regeneration. He wanted to realize this bright and beautiful vision by making the “Sanskrit language popular so that the ancient knowledge embedded in these texts may become accessible to the Indians in every nook and corner...” (Biswas 2022, 230). He conveyed the message of the recognition of unity in the variety and diversity of each nation, believing that every country should keep in mind that it had a specific goal or theme — however, subject to that underlying unity, there would also be differences between one man and another in ability and quality (Gupta 2001, 59).

5 “The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Mayavati Memorial Edition), part 1, 1936, P-140.” (Reference No. 1 of Saroj Kumar Panda's paper)

Vivekanand encouraged fearlessness. He was very critical of the dark side of the British rule in India. At the house of Professor J. H. Wright, he once said, “India has been conquered again and again for years and last and worst of all came the Englishman... the English have sucked the last drop of our blood... they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved in villages and provinces” (Gupta 2001, 67). He wanted Indians to have physical, moral, and mental strength. He rejected the non-resistance policy, as it gave the wicked freedom to harass others: “[T]alk of violence would not arouse any qualms of conscience in him, for he knew that a man has to kill millions of microbes if he has to breathe and several worms if he has to walk, and also millions of insects if he has to read the Gita by candlelight” (70). He was all praise for the Rani of Jhansi, the Mahrattas led by Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. His favorite hero in literature was Satan, who “adopts all means, good or bad, to carry on a relentless war with an invincible enemy... he wanted to emphasize Satan’s unyielding courage and tenacity rather than his wickedness” (71). Robert Clive, who used force and deceit to take control of India for England, was another figure that inspired admiration in Vivekananda.

Vivekananda left an indelible impact on the world through his profound teachings and vision. His legacy continues to inspire millions, guiding them towards a life of purpose and spiritual growth. Regarding the relevance of Vivekananda at present, Baier (2019) writes:

Hinduism as a unifying factor and basis of national identity; the Vedas as a manifestation of a knowledge encompassing and surpassing all religions while being compatible with Western science and, indeed, anticipating its results; and India’s spiritual superiority, arising out of Hinduism’s experience-centered approach, in the global context – all these ideas, for which Vivekananda strongly campaigned, still exert a formative influence on contemporary, religiously-tinged Indian nationalism.

5. Gandhi: Cultural Nationalism

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is known as the Mahatma, the title conferred upon him by Tagore. He dominated the Indian socio-political scene from 1919 to 1948; this period is thus called the Gandhian period in Indian history. He started his career as a barrister, and a firm hired his services to advocate its pending cases in South Africa. In South Africa, he raised his voice against the treatment meted out to the Asian emigrant communities and the black natives at the hands of the white racist regime. Gandhi was

imprisoned four times during his 20-year tenure in South Africa (1893-1914). "The South African experience made Gandhi turn to pacifism. He read Thoreau and Tolstoy... Ruskin's *Unto This Last...* *The Gita...*" (Singh, 2006, 242). In 1915, Gandhi returned to India and received recognition there for his work in Africa. He spent the next four years studying the Indian situation and entered the mainstream of Indian politics after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919.

Gandhi embraced the ideas of *Swaraj* (self-rule), *Swadeshi* (native products for social development), *Swadharma* (to follow the best in our own religion), *Satyagraha* (holding fast to truth), *Sarvodaya* (upliftment of all), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Asangrah* (non-possession), *Sharirashrama* (physical labor), *Aswads* (control of palate), *Sarvatra-Bhaya-Varjana* (fearlessness), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). He proposed that as every country was fit to eat, drink, and breathe, so was every nation fit to manage its own affairs. His idea of *Swaraj* was based on the *Ramrajya*, where the necessities of life were enjoyed by the ruler as well as the subject. At the same time, he also spoke about *Swaraj* within oneself – i.e., complete disciplined rule from within (Mohapatra 2009, 18).

Gandhi's *satyagraha* system of protest was a local and indigenous struggle based on a larger idea of non-violence. Passive resistance and personal discipline became the key modes of struggle. In addition, his vegetarianism, support for local languages and culture, and the anti-industrial stance all constituted key early elements in what postcolonial theory after Fanon would consolidate, namely, *cultural nationalism* and *cultural affirmation*. (Nayar 2010, 155)

Gandhi believed in the supreme power of truth. For him, God was truth, and truth was God. He was against untouchability and looked forward to Hindu-Muslim unity. For him, religion was not meant for personal purification but rather an immensely powerful social bond (Mohapatra 2009, 22).

Gandhi designed a constructive program for the development of India on all fronts. Some of the important issues and ideas he included in the plan were: a ban on alcohol, the promotion and use of *khadi*, education with the approach of character building, equality for women, an emphasis on following the Indian way of healthy living, the promotion of what he called economic trusteeship, building up peasants' and workers' organizations, and the integration of tribal people into mainstream political and economic life. Gandhi favored local self-government at village and town levels for effective administration. He promoted simple living and high thinking.

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi addressed one and all in India. He attempted to recast the nationalist consciousness through moral regeneration. He rejected the immorality and inhumanity of modern civilization manifested in industrialization and capitalism. He allowed “nationalized or state-controlled” large-scale industries to a limited extent for the benefit of humanity (Suda 1972, 176). Gandhi was not against machines as such but against the ill effects of industrialization, which centralized wealth and made the poor poorer. His concept of *swaraj*, an indigenous and Vedic word with sacred origins, did not only mean political independence but also included the idea of liberation of the soul through self-interrogation (*moksha*). He disapproved of the word “independence,” which usually means freedom from all restraints. He was critical of unrestrained desires and temptations, which were responsible for the promotion of evils like colonization and imperialism among foreigners and which, he believed, led Indian youth to mimic European civilizations. He believed that the purification of the self would lead to the de-contamination of the nation from Western influences. Gandhi did not “seek the annihilation of the oppressors, but instead, their salvation” (Habib 2017, 23).

Gandhi claimed that he had nothing new to teach the world. He wrote, “I don’t claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems” (1955, 7).⁶ Gandhi concluded his autobiography, published in 1927, with the observation that those who sought to dissociate politics and religion understood the meaning of neither politics nor religion. He admitted in 1934 that he “could not live for a single second without religion”: “Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are [sic] derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion...I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath” (1980, 65).⁷ Gandhi’s view of religion was broad, controversial, and debatable. At times, he contradicted his own views. He himself said, “The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow” (43). Gandhi never confined himself to strict dogmas. In “Gandhi’s Religion: A Few Thoughts”, Lal refers to some instances when Gandhi contradicted his earlier views regarding religion. He says that Gandhi was ever-changing regarding conversion, visiting temples, or orthodox *Sanatan dharma*. Nevertheless, Gandhi was a true humanist; he did not mind questioning the portions of religious texts that would disturb the human conscience.

6 *Harijan*, March 28th, 1936.

7 *Harijan*, March 21st, 1934, 54.

The Gandhian idea of religion in politics was very much secular, focusing on the cultural aspect of religion and emphasizing the inclusion of moral and ethical values of religion in politics with the goal of making politics sacred. Lal says that Gandhi embraced the view that a proper understanding of one's religion requires an understanding of other faiths. "At his daily evening prayer meetings, conducted not in temples but under the open sky, passages were read from the Koran, the New Testament, The Geeta, The Upanishads, and even from modern Christian literature, such as Cardinal Newman's 'Lead, Kindly Light'" (Lal 2015). Gandhi's attitude towards religion was flexible and humane. For him, God was truth and non-violence. In this way, he was concerned with values rather than any sectarian form of religion and God.⁸ Ahmed (2010) says that Gandhi wanted religion to positively bring India's myriad of religious, sectarian, ethnic, and caste-based communities into an inclusive grand composite nation. He opposed the division of India into Pakistan and India. "My national service,' Gandhi said, 'is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh'" (Dubey n.d., 90). He saw his patriotism as a step toward ultimate freedom and serenity, and thus, for him, there was no politics without religion. Gandhi viewed politics in relation to the moral aspect of religion (Chandra 1999, 95).

Gandhi's views towards religion changed in the last phase of his life when he delinked politics and religion altogether. He probably did this to avoid giving any wrong message to the masses, likely when he found that a religion could be used politically to spread communal hatred and violence against the followers of other religions. In 1942, he said, "Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics" (Chandra 1999, 93), and in the June 29, 1947 issue of *Harijan*, he wrote, "Religion is no test of nationality, but a personal matter between man and his God. In the sense of nationality they are Indians first and Indians last, no matter what religion they profess." Ironically, on January 30th, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, "a Hindu nationalist," allegedly because of Gandhi's advocacy for Muslims⁹ and distortion of Hinduism.

8 Gandhi said that religious texts should also be subjected to the changing standards of morality and conscience (Ahmed 2010).

9 "...the Indian government was withholding Rs 550 million due to Pakistan as its share of the cash left behind in the common kitty [sic] of the colonial state. India and Pakistan had been drawn into a military conflict over Kashmir, and the Indian government took the stand that Pakistan would purchase weapons with it. Gandhiji did not accept such reasoning and started a fast-unto-death to compel the Indian government to pay Pakistan its share. That infuriated Hindu nationalists. On 30th January 1948, Gandhiji was assassinated by Nathuram Godse" (Ahmed 2010).

Various scholars criticize Gandhian thought and its influences. To quote Grover and Mehta,

...the Imperialists like Lord Linlithgow called Gandhian methods as 'a form of blackmail'...Steeped in idealism, many of Gandhi's ideas were divorced from realism. His philosophy of 'the charkha, the bullock-cart and self-sufficient village' has not prevented modern India from large-scale industrialization and a great expansion of the public sector. Again, Gandhi's idea of the rich becoming the 'trustees' of the poor seems unworkable. He had no faith in socialism or communism but these seem popularisms of today. (2010, 336)

Singh (2006) notes that Gandhi wanted the Jews to resist Hitler passively. However, "when India fought Pakistan in Kashmir in 1947 and forcibly took over Hyderabad, Gandhi defended the Indian action. Charitably, this can be seen as the contradictions that exist in all great men" (246). Chandra (1999) says that after Gandhi suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement because of the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, Gandhi assured Nehru and other leaders that he would not give up the upcoming struggle because of isolated acts of violence by a small group of people, as long as the majority of satyagrahis practiced non-violence. Despite widespread violence by enraged mobs in Sholapur and other locations throughout 1930 and 1931, he did not discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement (97).

In "Gandhi as Mahatma," Shahid Amin (1988) speaks about the power and glory of Gandhi among the common masses during the Non-Cooperation movement. He takes up the case of Abdulla Julaha, Bhagwan Ahir, and Rampati Chamar, the three Congress volunteers of Chauri Chaura, who were sentenced to death by the High Court of Allahabad in 1923. The convicts had set the police station on fire to usher in "Gandhi ji's Swaraj" (Amin 1988, 66). Amin asserts that the rustic people thought Gandhi to be a divine figure and spread stories of miracles occurring in the name of Gandhi. "Gandhi was also fitted into the widespread practice of the taking of a vow (*manuati*), addressed to a god, a local godling or a saint, on condition that an affliction be removed or that a wish be fulfilled" (76). The writer says that Gandhi was a divine figure in the popular imagination of the rustic people, and this popular image was incompatible with the actual Gandhian thought.

6. Nehru: Socialist Nationalism

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was raised with an ambivalent attitude towards the British and British lifestyle at home. Nehru and other educated

middle-class people in India disliked the British colonial power because it despised and degraded the colonized, the intelligentsia included. However, Nehru's instructors and governesses had also instilled a love of the English language, literature, and science in him (Nafziger 1968, 11). Nehru's studies at foreign universities helped him look at India from an objective viewpoint and developed a sense of nationalism in him. His studies assisted him in creating standards to judge the British rule rather than helping him accept it (12).

Imperialism and racism, from Nehru's perspective, were two of the worst aspects of the British administration. He believed that the British adhered to a "master race" mindset (Nafziger 1968, 17). Political freedom was at the core of Nehru's nationalism in the 1920s. Due to this, he proposed a resolution for total independence during the 1927 Madras Congress Session, irrespective of Gandhi's opposition to it (17). He believed nationalism to be a positive force rather than a narrow fanatic one. He was one of the champions of India's freedom struggle, and he wrote: "[N]ationalism was and is inevitable in the India of my day; it is a natural and healthy growth. For any subject country national freedom must be the first and dominant urge; for India, with her intense sense of individuality and a past heritage, it was doubly so" (2004, 44).

There was only "Indian" nationalism, according to Nehru; neither "Hindu" nor "Muslim" nationalism existed for him (Nafziger 1968, 20). For him, religion was an individual's personal sphere, and communal forces, which under the guise of what people call culture, "narrow our minds and our outlook. These forces are essentially a restriction and denial of any real kind of culture. Culture is the widening of the mind and the spirit" (Habib 2017, 8). He believed that the nationalist movement could only succeed through non-violence, which he saw as a practical imperative (Nafziger 1968, 23). In the late 1930s, Nehru did acknowledge that violence might be advantageous, but he disregarded the possibility due to a lack of resources and expertise (24). "Non-violence thus was not a creed for Nehru" (24). Nehru had a great interest in India's social, economic, and political aspects. His nationalism was stimulated by the subjugation of India, which had led to its poverty and degradation.

The initial urge came to me, I suppose, through pride, both individual and national, and the desire, common to all men, to resist another's domination and have freedom to live the life of our choice. It seemed monstrous to me that a great country like India, with a rich and immemorial past, should be bound hand and foot to a far-away island which imposed its will upon her. It was still more monstrous that this forcible union had resulted in poverty and

degradation beyond measure. That was reason enough for me and for others to act. (Nehru 2004, 40)

The Indian nationalist movement was a political movement, but it also had economic, social, and religious aspects (Nafziger 1968, 13). Nehru embraced socialism as an aid to nationalism. In his speeches and writings, such as *Whither India*, Nehru strove to link nationalism and socialism, arguing that the objectives of national independence could not be fully accomplished without being united with socialism.

Socialism aims at equal distribution of resources through the social ownership of the means of production and seeks cooperative management of the economy. Its spirit is oppositional to capitalism, which encourages private ownership and unequal distribution of resources in society. Since a human is a social being, whatever they produce is a social product. The philosophy of socialism argues that everyone who contributes to the production of a good is entitled to have a share in it. Unlike in communism, where all proceeds are divided on the basis of need, all proceeds under socialism are divided on the basis of each individual's contribution to society; shared ownership is a goal since it gives everyone the right to participate in the social decisions that influence them. There are, however, a multitude of opinions about the exact meaning of socialism and the most effective ways of bringing it about.

Under such a social and economic system, every person would have equal access to objects, goods, and services in society, and everyone would voluntarily do valuable work according to their capacity and capability. As socialism is based on a collectivist ideology, it envisions the socialization or nationalization of means of production in agriculture and industry, the equitable distribution of various goods and services, and the establishment of cooperative societies. It emphasizes social and political equality. Its foundation is laid in political as well as social equality. Political equality necessitates the participation of everyone in political processes through voting, contesting elections, and expressing opinions and views without any fear of discrimination. Social equality also means the availability of equal opportunities irrespective of one's birth, caste, creed, religion, and the like.

Nehru "found in socialism a continuation of his love of nationalism" (J. Mohan 1975, 183). He never wrote out a definition of socialism, though he consistently spoke about it. According to him, socialism – a way of life and a way of thinking and functioning – was a dynamic, growing, developing idea that challenged any stable and static definition. His approach to socialism was scientific and pragmatic. He wanted to adapt the socialist ideology to

the peculiarity of Indian society. When he came across the oppressed tenants of Oudh in 1920, he realized that “the ultimate remedy was abolition of landlordism, removal of intermediaries and the dissolution of the feudal socio-economic structure...” (Ganguli 1964, 1213). In his presidential address to the Lahore Congress in 1929, Nehru asserted:

...the philosophy of socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over and almost the only points in dispute are the pace and the methods of advance to its full realisation. India will have to go that way, too, if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality, though she may evolve her own methods and may adapt the ideal to the genius of her race. (J. Mohan 1975, 185)

Nehru put in efforts for socialism; in 1931, the Karachi Congress resolution on socialism advocated “nationalization of key industries and services and various other measures to lessen the burden on the poor and increase it on the rich” (Sachi 1964, 1229). When Nehru was appointed the president of the Congress in 1936, seven right-wing leaders, including Rajendra Prasad, resigned because of his socialistic ideas. They later withdrew their resignations, however.

Being a democratic socialist, Nehru did not wish to impose socialism on Indians; according to him, socialism could be achieved in India with the consent of a great majority of the people:

He [Nehru] considers his nationalism, which exists side by side with his socialism, merely as an expediency to get rid of foreign rule. He aims to change India from within by arguing that communalism and capitalism must go and calling for a complete nationalization. Whereas Mahatma Gandhi is the continuation of the nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements, and played a key role in resurrecting more humane and spiritual principles of old Hinduism applied to life, Jawaharlal Nehru, at least in ideology, completes the break with the Hindu past. (Edib 2009)

Nehru accepted that life could be richer and fuller, rejecting Gandhi's asceticism. He fought as a crusader against the elements that undermined pride and human dignity (Sachi 1964, 1227). He was against the use of violence in collective struggles but did not refrain from using it when other methods had failed.¹⁰ From Gandhi, he learned that the means of social change had to be peaceful. He believed in the potential of human beings.

¹⁰ “[Nehru's] use of force in Hyderabad, Kashmir or Goa was only as a last resort and his decisions were taken only after he felt that there was no other course left open” (Sachi 1964, 1227).

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He disliked “religious fetishes and practices, rituals and dogmas which made man a prisoner and a slave of superstitious beliefs by weakening his will” (1228). He was a man of science and technology. He hated poverty and saw industrialization as a potential cure for India’s economic problems. Nehru was against capitalism; he was also against the regimentation and intolerance of totalitarian socialism. Hence, he wanted to follow a middle path. He favored a positive role for the private sector, which called for effective state regulation and control. He said that production was more important than distribution. For the success of democratic socialism, Nehru emphasized the cooperative movement in India. According to him, Gandhi’s socialism had nothing to do with the economic framework of society, and it was “a kind of muddled humanitarianism” (Gopal 1983, 102). Nehru also sharply reacted against Gandhi’s “trusteeship,” which was supposed to solve the class conflict.

This section briefly explores Nehruvian Socialism only as the ideology espoused by Nehru in pre-independence India and not as a matter of Nehru’s practice after becoming the Prime Minister of independent India. It is said that Nehru’s attitude to socialism has led to some duality: “This may mean one of two things, that Nehru talked socialism when not in office but gave it up when he became Prime Minister, or that, with Nehru, socialism was a growing thing, and that there was nothing static or dogmatic about his conception of socialism” (Sachi 1964, 1227).

7. Conclusion

The idea of nationalism is multi-dimensional, protean, and flexible in nature. The diversity of the Indian context makes the fluid nature of nationalism particularly discernible. For Aurobindo, nationalism was not a mere political program but a religion that has come from God. Despite Vivekananda’s assertion that he belonged equally to the world and India, his nationalism was fundamentally based on Indian spiritual culture. On the other hand, Gandhian nationalism advocated the ideas of self-rule, native products for social development, following the best in one’s own religion, holding fast for truth, upliftment of all, celibacy, non-possession, physical labor, control of palate, fearlessness, and non-violence. Jawaharlal Nehru “found in socialism a continuation of his love of nationalism” (J. Mohan 1975, 183). Preetam (2009) rightly claims that “nationalism shows every sign of suffering from the political equivalent of multiple-personality syndrome” (26).

“Our nationalism reflected the collective pride of all Indians, no citizen felt left out from its ambit due to religion, caste, language or region.” (Habib 2017, 9). The multi-sidedness of Indian nationalism, with its various expressions

and perspectives, reflected the pluralistic nature of India. It also showcased the strength and resilience of India's socio-political fabric, where diverse voices could coexist and contribute to national growth and development. The inclusive aspect of Indian nationalism accommodated multiple regional, linguistic, and religious identities, generating a sense of belonging and collective national identity. The pluralistic approach catered to the needs and ambitions of many communities within India during the National Movement, resulting in a more responsive and inclusive system.

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