INTRODUCTION


**Introduction**

British colonialism introduced the intrusion of modernity, which coincided with the nationalist movement in India. This resulted in a flurry of nationalist thought, where elites who took part in the national movement tried to give conceptual ideas to the struggle against British domination. These ideas were meant to, on the one hand, imagine a nation into being, and on the other, give an ideological direction to the nationalist movement. To study Indian nationalist thought would be to study the imaginative and theoretical history of the nationalist movement. Imagination here is meant as a category of thought which produces knowledge through the specific process of “imagining a nation” in the representational mode. Theoretical is meant as the ensemble of conceptual ideas, which emerge from the discourses of nationalist thought. There are of course ideological underpinnings in any discourse, but until the nature of nationalist thought is itself determined, it is better to keep its emergent nature in the sphere of what has been called the “spontaneous ideology”\(^1\) of nationalist thought.

This study of Indian nationalist thought focuses on the writings of Nehru and Gandhi. It will primarily look at two principal texts: Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* and Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*. These two texts form the main gamut of ideas in Nehru and Gandhi as they grapple with the idea of the nation and the issue of nationalist struggle. It is in these two texts that their ideas take firm shape and offers an entire structure of thought that opens them to interpretation. These two texts can be taken as two moments in the history of

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Indian nationalist thought where the discourse of nationalism gives us an idea of how it was conceived and what directions it took. Nehru and Gandhi being prime actors in the nationalist struggle, their ideas give us a glimpse of how certain ideas were in the thick of the real, political struggle of the nationalist movement itself.

In studying the ideas of Nehru and Gandhi, this work would primarily involve itself with the work of Partha Chatterjee, who has given a framework of the nationalist discourse by discussing both Nehru and Gandhi among others. This study would more than occasionally place itself in relation to Chatterjee's ideas and look for both agreements disagreements. However, this study on Nehru and Gandhi won't begin with Chatterjee's premises but relate itself to his work at various points.

Partha Chatterjee studies the ideology of Indian nationalist thought. He calls Indian nationalist thought a "derivative discourse", as according to him, it borrows Western knowledge to counter the ideology of British rule. This, according to Chatterjee, makes Indian nationalist discourse "inauthentic" from an ideological point of view, and Chatterjee focuses on this problem which Indian nationalist thought faces as it tries to argue for its own autonomy. As he says:

"There is ... an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking, because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure

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2 Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, OUP, Delhi, 1996
corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate.  

Chatterjee takes Anouar Malek’s framework of Orientalism, to study the representational aspect of Indian nationalist thought. It is through this framework that Chatterjee develops his distinctive mode of operating through the dual nature of a “thematic” and “problematic” analysis of nationalist thought. The problematic, according to Malek is where the Orient and the Oriental is made “an object of study, stamped with an otherness” where it is “customary, passive, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself” and “posed, understood, defined – and acted – by others.” The thematic, according to Malek, is the “essentialist concept of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology” where the Orientalist is both historical as well as a-historical, imbued with an “inalienable and non-evolutive specificity.”

Chatterjee takes as the thematic, as that analytical zone where the social ideology of nationalist thought asserts its existence, and the problematic in the zone where nationalist thought seeks to justify those assertions through epistemic and moral principles.

Chatterjee uses this framework to launch his theoretical critique of the ideological underpinnings of Indian nationalist thought. The main framework of European knowledge is allied to the Enlightenment and Indian nationalist thought is seen vis-à-vis its allegiances with the Enlightenment framework.

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3 Ibid. p. 38
4 Ibid. p. 36
5 Ibid. p. 37
The Enlightenment is seen as the main philosophical baggage behind the ideology of colonialism.

The present study on Nehru and Gandhi would contest certain key claims of Chatterjee. It would seek to look at Nehru’s and Gandhi’s thoughts from a more complex structure of ideas. On the one hand, it would seek to find the various “Indian” social and cultural contexts through which Nehru and Gandhi positions their ideas in the nationalist discourse. On the other, the study would probe into Chatterjee’s claim about a strict Enlightenment discourse of reason as being part of the Indian nationalist thinking. Nehru and Gandhi would seem to be arguing their case from a more heterogenous framework of ideas, at once cultural, historical and ethical.

The present study would look into the representational claims that Chatterjee makes on behalf on Indian nationalist thought. It would seek to find whether the ideas of Nehru and Gandhi borrows Oriental notions of imagining the nation or contests it.

For example, Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* is a seminal text in the history of nationalist thought. It is an attempt at direct history, both factual and imaginative, by a participant. Its genre includes history, politics, sociology and ethics. It is a descriptive narrative of India’s history with a strong prescriptive content. However, Nehru talks about “India” as a construct in itself. The word “nation” is not the key word in *The Discovery*. It is almost used as a derivative word, which is in a sense restrictive to the overall idea of the word “India”. In other words, the word “nation” is a specific historical problem in Nehru, with regard to the much more broader question of the idea of India.
In the case of Gandhi, the notion of the nation described by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* as "praja" has a different connotation than the Western notion of the nation. It fuses elements of a pre-modern community now under a specific modern, historical context, and also includes the conception of a modern community of professionals in various fields of knowledge. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is a moral programme aimed at defining the specific goals of Indian nationalism, which is also outside the immediate nationalist framework of thinking.

This would sharply problematize Chatterjee's claim that Indian nationalist thought is "inauthentic" and loses autonomy owing to its borrowing of Western structures of thought. The modern aspects of Nehru's and Gandhi's ideas would be studied with regard to Chatterjee's claims that the borrowing strictly takes place from the Enlightenment framework.

Also, there have been claims by scholars about Nehru being a Western rationalist and Gandhi being a traditionalist thinker. The study would not directly contest these claims but in the course of analysis find out how true these claims are.

Since neither Nehru nor Gandhi is a theoretician, the study won't try to read them as such, but locate and analyze the conceptual ideas, which emerge through their writings. It would try to present a coherent structure through which the principal ideas of the two, as they coincide with the study's objective, work themselves out.

The first chapter would deal with Nehru's ideas. We would first look at the relationship between identity, science and tradition. This would help us place
Nehru more specifically in the modern debate regarding the question of modern identity as caught between the pulls of tradition and the categories of science. We would then place Nehru at the larger level of relationship between nationalism, colonialism and modernity. We would also trace the normative aspects of Nehru's ideas vis-à-vis these constructs. Finally we would take up the representational aspect of Nehru's imagining of India.

The second chapter would deal with Gandhi. We would first look at the relations of the Gandhian self with three key categories important to Gandhi's thought: civilization, religion and history. This would help us place the Gandhian self in the very mode he places himself. The relationship would also entail a look into the Gandhian self as the subject of ethics. Secondly, we would look into Gandhi's conception of modernity and its evils, namely, the aspect of self-interest, technology and industrialism. This would help us place Gandhi in the larger narrative of concrete modern categories, which form Gandhi's main target of critique. Thirdly we would look at Gandhi's conception of the nation as praja. This will take us to the specific nationalistic goals that Gandhi conceptualizes. We would see how Gandhi, in addition to defining the "nation", addresses what kind of challenges it faces and what kind of politics would answer those challenges.

In the third chapter we look at two key aspects of Nehru's nationalist framework. The first we call, the relation between culture and democracy. This relationship is Nehru's primary concern throughout the pages of The Discovery. The whole enterprise in this book which is about Nehru's foray into India's past and his trying to make a conscious sense of how this past and present is linked, and wherever it isn't linked, to invent one, is basically seen
to be Nehru's attempt in studying how India's cultural past and modern democracy fit in together. In other words, it can also be said to be an attempt to link up the idea of the nation with the idea of democracy. But Nehru has a loosely imagined anthropocentric idea of India without going into any strict definitions of what makes India a nation, barring the question of a shared cultural past, which is largely of a common stock and yet heterogenous. To this idea Nehru brings in the idea of democracy through, both, a statist understanding of political rule as well as certain social principles guiding the people. The second key aspect we study here is how Nehru specifically draws up the identity of the Indian, partly in terms of cultural history and partly, in fact more prescriptively, in terms of the modern, liberal principles of citizenry and social values. Previously having tried to understand his idea of India, we turn here to specifically look at how Nehru tries to describe the identity of the Indian with respect to the idea of India.

The fourth chapter firstly examines the issue of choices Gandhi confronted vis-à-vis British colonialism, particularly, and modernity, fundamentally. Politics for Gandhi was inevitably linked to the self, where choices had to be made at each step. Secondly, besides defining the goal of politics, Gandhi was equally, if not more, interested in the means of achieving the same. Thus, the struggle that colonised India had undertaken to attain independence from the British Raj, had to be envisioned not only in terms of strategy, but more crucially, in terms of ethics. His ideal of an Indian society was embedded in the conceptualisation of this political struggle, both of which then, were integrally yoked to the question of ethical choices.
The fifth chapter is a conclusive one, where we finally compare the ideas of Nehru and Gandhi in both specific and general terms. We look at how both Nehru and Gandhi enters the nationalist debate from different trajectories vis-à-vis the colonial confrontation, both being modernists but placing themselves at quite radically different positions with respect to modernity. In fact it is the difference in their attitude towards modernity and what was understood as Indian culture and tradition, which separated their views. For Nehru the operative word was 'culture' while for Gandhi it was 'tradition'. Though the vocabulary and sentiment of their arguments were different one would look at how both were products of a modernist trend of ideas in the overall ambit of nationalist thought. We would look at how Gandhi and Nehru placed the key concepts of history, culture, modernity and the nation-state within their respective frameworks and sought to find the relations between them.

The method applied to the study of the work of Nehru and Gandhi would be both interpretive and analytical. We would look at the various views regarding their ideas and seek to place them in a fresher perspective as we deal with those ideas. The analytical tools will not try to forge theoretical arguments beyond the emergent and non-theoretical nature of Gandhi's and Nehru's ideas but would certainly place them alongside conceptual and philosophical issues that come up while discussing their ideas in theoretical terms.