In his book *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi wrote that "The English have taught us that we were no one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us."
Gandhi thus believed that a homogenous community having a unique mode of life and a singular culture embodying the thought process of the community reflects the nation. Gandhi in the subsequent paragraphs of the same chapter of the *Hind Swaraj* viewed that initially it is religion, (and not the print capitalism of the modern era as Anderson argued) which spreaded the imagination of the community. Gandhi said, "But they" (‘the ancestors of ours’) “saw India was undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. And we Indians are one as no two Englishmen are. Only you and I and others who consider ourselves civilized and superior persons imagine that we are many nations.”

Thus for Gandhi, undivided land and a singular “mode of life” and basing upon that singular culture are the essential ingredients of a comprehensive nation, and also to him the normative idea of nation, did not presuppose the prior existence of the state. At the same time in the *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi argued, “India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation; they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. ... In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.”

The last sentence is specifically important. Gandhi then believes that
the spirit of nationality in India was initially ignited by the Hindu religious ideas and it did grow by assimilating the religious communities rather than replacing them. Further, this assimilation process at the social level got differentiated in the hands of the imperial power, “who subsequently divided us.”

In the Young India Gandhi wrote that “There never can be any conflict between the real interest of one’s country and that of one’s religion. Where there appears to be any, there is something wrong with one’s religion, i.e. one’s morals. True religion means good thought and good conduct. True patriotism also means good thought and good conduct. To set up a comparison between two synonymous things is wrong.”

Gandhi refused to accept religion more clearly as the basis of nationhood. In the Harijan he wrote, “There may be arguable grounds for maintaining that Muslims in India are a separate nation. But I have never heard it said that there are as many nations as there are religions on earth. If there are, it would follow that man changes his nationality when he changes his faith. According to my correspondent, English, Egyptians, Americans, Japanese, etc. are not nations, but Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Buddhists are different nations, no matter where born. I am afraid my correspondent occupies very weak ground in maintaining that nations are or should be divided according to their religions. In his zeal to maintain an untenable position he has over proved his case.

“I must deny that the Muslim dynasties divided India into nations. Akbar’s example is irrelevant. He aimed at a fusion of religions. It was a dream not to be realized. But the other muslim emperors and kings surely regarded India as one indivisible whole. That is how I learnt history as a boy.”
Since religion, to Gandhi, cannot be the basis of a nation, he described the theory of two-nation as proclaimed by Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, as an "untruth". He wrote that "The two-nation theory is an untruth. The vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or are descendants of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they became converts. A Bengali Muslim speaks the same tongue that a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food and has the same amusements as his Hindu neighbour. They dress alike. I have often found it difficult to distinguish by outward sign between a Bengali Hindu and a Bengali Muslim. The same phenomenon is observable more or less in the South among the poor, who constitute the masses of India. The Hindu law of inheritance governs many Muslim groups. Sir Mahomad Iqbal used to speak with pride of his Brahmanical descent. Iqbal and Kitchlew are names common to Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus and Muslims in India are not two nations. Those whom God has made one, man will never be able to divide."6

Thus it is evident that Gandhi believed cultural spirit is the binding thread of a particular nation. It is for this reason once he told that "I am convinced of the necessity that we should insist on every Indian wearing the same nationalist dress."7 To Gandhi culture is basically certain codes of conduct and religion, particularly Hindu religion initially created these codes of conduct in ancient India. As the above paragraph shows, Gandhi believes that the Muslims of India are basically converts from Hinduism. But the conversion of religion does not mean the conversion in the cultural codes of conduct. Consequently, he believes that the oneness in culture, which is the unique characteristics of a nation was there in ancient India and is existing since then in modern India. Since "God has made" Indians "one" "man" that is the colonial rulers and a few, who bore their ideas, "will never be able to divide" them.
Besides Gandhi believed that "If religion is allowed to be as it is, a personal concern and a matter between God and man, there are many dominating common factors between the two which will compel common life and common action. Religions are not for separating much from one another, they are meant to bind them." 

Religion and Nation:

Gandhi wrote, "Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the maker and itself."

This conception of religion sees the basic elements of humanity, not any sect as primary and stresses the sanctity of communication between the knower and the truth as revealed through the permanent elements in human nature rather than the physical sphere of human conduct. Gandhi also tried to identify these permanent elements in human nature. As he wrote, "To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of atheist."

At another place Gandhi wrote, "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals."
Gandhi viewed that the place of religion in human affairs has to be studied in the totality of human activity. In the *Harijan* Gandhi wrote, “I still hold the view that I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion. Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.”

For Gandhi, political activities are teleological in nature. As he views, “Man’s ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, political, social and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God.” Thus, politics for Gandhi, is not only inalienably connected with the religious activities of the human beings, but also should be guided by religious principles for the ultimate aim of realizing God. As Gandhi views, “This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Indeed, even the so called realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. ... I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings.” In fact, as Raghaban Iyer views, Gandhi was “Pre-Machiavellian in his refusal to segregate religion from politics; but he was ‘also post-Asokan in his emphasis upon dharma rather than moksha, the Moral law rather than personal salvation through political disengagement’.”

Thus Gandhi attempted to reconstruct the structure of identity in the Indian nation on the basis of a common cultural discourse and a common ethics and morality for all the Indians irrespective of distance between the different religious groups. Certain basic things are required for imagining
such a social world. First from a negative aspect, true religion as Gandhi views, does not speak of any narrow sectarianism since it is based on the permanent elements in human nature. Second, from a positive aspect, he believed that any human activity, be it social or political, should be reflecting a common practice of faith for realizing God. Clearly, this imagination process does not fit even Western secularization and denies the complexities and interruptions of the rationalisation process. But it serves the purpose of nation-building since it “fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world.”

In fact religion in every society has got a structure which projects a cultural pattern, a design for living and an identity. It is concerned with social construction through a system of symbolism and expression, which directs human thought and action and provides societies with an organizing principle which gives form and shape to the societies. It is this point which has been reflected in the Gandhian thought. Gandhi believed that religion as a symbolic frame determines perception and action of social groups; perceptions that can mould objective conditions in a particular way. That way, to Gandhi, religion is an internal and a conditioning aspect of the total structure of society. This point, reveals a logic of its own which establishes an interrelation between religion and the nation and makes religion implicitly or explicitly a part of ideological apparatus for the nation-building.

Nehru wrote, “Gandhiji continually laid stress on the religious and spiritual side of the national movement. His religion was not dogmatic, but it did mean a definitely religious outlook on life, and the whole movement was strongly influenced by this and took on a rationalist charter so far as the masses were concerned. ...
"I used to be troubled sometimes at the growth of this religious element in our politics, on both the Hindu and the Moslem side. I did not like it all. Much that Maulavis and Maulanas and Swamis and the like said in their public addresses seemed to me most unfortunate. Their history and sociology and economics appeared to me all wrong, and the religious twist that was given to everything prevented all clear thinking. Even some of Gandhiji's phrases sometimes jarred upon me – thus his frequent reference to Rama Raj as a golden age which was to return. But I was powerless to intervene and I consoled myself with the thought that Gandhiji used the words because they were well known and understood by the masses."17

II

Nehru was steeped in bourgeois humanist liberal tradition. His attack against colonialism was based on this tradition and never went beyond the liberal discourse. He represented a post-enlightenment spirit of Europe and with a scientific and secular make-up felt uncomfortable with the attempt to introduce religion in the realm of politics. Consequently in many points Nehru felt difficulty in understanding Gandhian strategy or technique.

Nehru did not regard nationalism as the spread of some sort of religious faith but rather a phenomenon that had arisen in a specific situation. His linking up of nationalism with the variants of socialist movement at different phases of his life led him to change the primacy of the nationalist ideas over other ideas, time and again, although he upheld the viability of nation as a determinate product of history. But throughout these shifting approaches he never left 'scientific' and/or 'rational' outlook as he realized "that science..."
was not only a pleasant diversion and abstraction, but was of the very texture of life, without which our modern world would vanish away.”

Hence, he said in the same address, “Politics led me to economics, and this led me inevitably to science and the scientific approach to all our problems and to life itself.”

Writing about his early life's philosophy Nehru wrote that “My early approach to life's problems had been more or less scientific, with something easy optimism of the science of the nineteenth century. A secure and comfortable existence and the energy and self-confidence increased that feeling of optimism. A kind of vague humanism appealed to me.”

But this vague humanism being substantiated by the doctrine of socialism became concrete in the twenties. He believed at this phase that “We may demand freedom for our country on many grounds, but ultimately it is the economic one that matters.”

Hence, at this phase he became more concerned with the attack against capitalism rather than political liberty. As he wrote, “Many of us who denounce British imperialism in India do not realize that it is not a phenomenon peculiar to the British race or to India, or that it is the consequence of industrial development on capitalist lines. Capitalism necessarily leads to exploitation of one man by another, one group by another, and one country by another. If, therefore, we are opposed to this imperialism and exploitation, we must be opposed to capitalism. The only alternative that is offered to us is some form of socialism.

“As a necessary result of this decision, we must fight British dominion in India not only on nationalistic grounds. Britain may well permit us to have a large measure of political liberty, but this will be worth little if she holds economic dominion over us.”
This primacy of international struggle against capitalism over nationalism was the effect of Nehru's study of Marx and Lenin and the observation of the practical achievements of the Soviet Union. As he wrote, "A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of its obscurity. The practical achievements of the Soviet Union were also tremendously impressive. Often I disliked or did not understand some development there and it seemed to me to be too closely concerned with the opportunism of the moment or the power politics of the day. But despite all these developments and possible distortions of the original passion for human betterment, I had no doubt that the Soviet Revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and that it had laid the foundations for that new civilization towards which the world could advance."  

In the *Glimpses of World History*, he again wrote about the unity of the non-cooperation movement. "The basis of the national movement was largely economic distress and unemployment. This gave rise to a common anti-British Government feeling in all groups and a vague desire for Swaraj or freedom. ... Swaraj had a different meaning for each such group – the unemployed middle class looked forward to employment, the peasant to a relief from the many burdens imposed on him by the landlord and so on."  

Nehru understood the heterogeneity and the inner-contradiction of Indian nationalism from an economic standpoint. But he made up his mind in mid-forties not to accept the proletarian internationalism in place of nationalism. He wrote in *The Discovery of India*, "Many people thought that nationalism had had its day and must inevitably give place to the ever-
growing international tendencies of the modern world. Socialism with its proletarian background derided national culture as something tied up with a decaying middle class. Capitalism itself became progressively international with its cartels and combines and overflowed national boundaries. Trade and commerce, easy communications and rapid transport, the radio and cinema, all helped to create an international atmosphere and to produce the delusion that nationalism was doomed.

"Yet wherever a crisis has arisen nationalism has emerged again and dominated the scene and people have sought comfort and strength in their old traditions. One of the remarkable developments of the present age has been the rediscovery of the past and of the nation. This going back to national traditions has been most marked in the ranks of labour and the proletarian elements, who were supposed to be the foremost champions of international action. War or similar crisis dissolves their internationalism and they become subject to nationalist hates and fears even more than other groups."²⁵

Nehru, thus, in this writing categorically established nation as a phenomenon of modern age, which has its root in the imagination of the old traditions. He is also specific about the fact that the solidarity of a nation flourishes best at the times of war or similar crisis, that is to say, when the material domain of a society i.e, the economy and the statecraft and so on is encroached upon by some outside forces. It is then the members of the society seek comfort and strength in their old traditions, which form the "essential marks of cultural identity."²⁶ Hence, in his The Discovery of India Nehru explicitly wrote, "Nationalism is essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions and experiences."²⁷
At the same time his approach to the past was rational. He believed that "A blind reverence for the past is bad and so also is a contempt for it, for no future can be founded on either of these."\textsuperscript{28} In case of India, he wanted to get rid of the cramped religious outlook, the obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculation and the loosening of the mind's discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism which obstructed people's understanding of each other and of the material world. He wrote in *The Discovery of India*, "Some Hindus talk of going back to the Vedas; some Moslems dream of an Islamic theocracy. Idle fancies, for there is no going back to the past; there is not turning back even if this was thought desirable. There is only one way traffic in time."\textsuperscript{29}

\section*{III}

From the above discussion we can now discern certain basic characteristics of Gandhian and Nehruvian ideas on nation. Gandhian ideas reflected the symbolism of a whole range of 'non-modern' ways of making meaning for the concept of nation. Nation, to Gandhi, is not a modern phenomenon in India and thereby he delinks nation from its concomitant historical phase of emergence, retrospectively called as modern age. For Gandhi, India was a truly spiritual nation; predominantly the land of religion which upheld the belief in the moral governance of the universe. He believed that before the advent of the Muslim rulers India was founded uniquely on the Hindu religion which basically created and spreaded a unique cultural code on the basis of which people of India, so to say, were united. Later on, some people were converted to different religions, particularly to Muslim religion. But their cultural practices remained the same. Since to Gandhi
the imagination of oneness develops from the cultural practices, hence India still remained one nation even after the advent of the British, although the British tried to split the nation on the basis of religion.

This view has, however serious limitations. As Prof. B. Parekh has pointed out, "It failed to appreciate the simple fact that Hinduism covered such a wide range of the belief and practices that none of these was shared by all its adherents, not even the belief in God, reincarnation and the law of Karma. The Hindus could not therefore be religiously or even culturally united without imposing an arbitrarily selected set of beliefs upon and thereby alienating the rest. Unlike Christianity, Islam and other religions, Hinduism was not a religion to which a Hindu subscribed; rather, it was largely whatever a Hindu over time had come to believe and practise. The Hindus could not therefore become a nation or even an ethical unit in the sense intended by the critical-traditionalists. Furthermore, any attempt to unite them inevitably alarmed the minorities so that, far from becoming the basis of the Indian state, the unity of the Hindus subverted it. It was hardly surprising that the militancy of the critical-traditionalists in the early years of the twentieth century intensified Muslim separatism. Even as they misunderstood Hinduism, they misunderstood Indian history. The Muslims were not a minority in the ordinary sense of the term and had ruled India for nearly five hundred years. Islam had profoundly shaped Hinduism and not only introduced new beliefs and practices but also altered its internal structure and self-perception. It had, in turn, been so deeply influenced by it that it was quite different from its counterparts in Persia, Turkey and other Muslim countries. Thanks to all this the identity of the Indian civilisation had undergone a profound mutation and could no longer be equated with the pre-Muslim ancestor. The critical-traditionalists were thus caught up in a dilemma: they could at best have a Hindu nation or an Indian state but not both."
Nehru’s ideas on the concept of nation were on the other hand primarily ‘modernist’. It accepted the universality of rationalist social thought, which attempts to find out certain concrete basis of nationalism in economy. Nehru took the membership of the national polity to be deeper and more forceful in the political context than a person’s religion or membership of a religious community. He made a separation of spheres in which religion might have a major role for the religiously oriented people in the personal and social activities, but the political identities of the very same persons were taken to be more oriented towards the nation, rather than being grounded in their religious creeds.

In one of his celebrated articles Amartya Sen has pointed out that “The objectivity of a particular perspective does not, by itself, establish its epistemic status beyond that of positional contingency.” He there gave the illustration that the sun and the moon are of much the same size when viewed from the earth. But this does not entail that they are of the same size in terms of all criteria of measurement. As he shows, “From a variety of positionally objective understandings, we can move in three distinct directions. The first is not to move at all, and to let the matter end there—there will be no positionally independent bottom line. The second is to seek some interpositional invariance – the genuine search for ‘the view from nowhere’. The second exercise is of great importance in epistemology and metaphysics. ... The third move, also in search of a trans-positional assessment would be to shift the choice away from pure epistemology (and also metaphysics) to practical reason, and to assess the different views in terms of their respective implications for action and to evaluate them in that light.” It is this last approach, invoking practical reason in addition to epistemic concerns that may be useful in explaining the difference between Gandhi and Nehru in their views regarding nation.
Gandhi's inclination was to see in Hinduism some over-arching values that transcended sectarianism and provided a cultural basis for unity as the substance of the nationalist interpretations. This was, in effect, a reaction to the colonial thesis of India's hopeless divisions which needed an imperial hand for protecting each group from the marauding other. Hence, Gandhi at the level of practical reason, wanted to uphold Hinduism as the major actor in the synthesis of the nation as a whole.

But Nehru was more cautious since he thought that the exclusionary implications of such a role of Hinduism (for example, for the Muslims of undivided India) would impose a heavy political burden as the prospect of independence and partition approached. This is more so, since as it has been observed in Chapter 1 that the impoverishment of the earlier "fuzzy" sense of the community had an insistence upon the identification of community in the "enumerable" sense, which put its impact on representative politics in different ways. Hence Nehru wrote, "It is, therefore, incorrect and undesirable to use 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' for Indian culture, even with reference to the distant past, although the various aspects of thought, as embodied in ancient writings, were the dominant expression of that culture."

Thus to counteract the imperial justification of having domination over India, Gandhi put forward certain indigenous discourse of religio-ethical ideological contours. But for the same purpose Nehru spoke in a rational western discourse. Consequently the meaning of nation entailed two different dialogues from them.
Notes and references


2. Ibid., chapter IX, p. 27.

3. Ibid., chapter X, p. 29.

4. Gandhi, M.K., 9.1.30., *Young India*.


7. Gandhi, M.K., 8.6.40, *Harijan*. in answer to a question in "Question Box".


9. Gandhi, M.K., 12.5.20, *Young India*.


22. Ibid., p.292.


29. Ibid, p. 520.

30. Parekh, Bhikhu, 1989, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform - An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, pp. 69-70. Italics in original. Parekh in this book showed that among the four pre-Gandhian trends of thought viz. traditionalism, modernism, critical-traditionalism and critical-modernism, Gandhi was sympathetic to the critical-traditionalism, although Gandhi viewed that the regenerative resources of the Hindu tradition has not been fully explored by this trend.

32. Ibid., p. 7.
