Nationalism in India: A Study of Influence of Tilak's Nation Centric and Tagore's Universalist Idealism on Contemporary Nationalism

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DECLARATION

I, Prasad Naik hereby declare that this thesis represents work which has been carried out by me and that it has not been submitted, either in part or full, to any other University or Institution for the award of any research degree.

Place: Taleigao Plateau.

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the above Declaration of the candidate, Prasad Naik is true and the work was carried out under my supervision.

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Dedicated

To

My Mother **Smita**

My Father **Shripad**

&

My late Grandmother **Satyabhama,** who taught me resilience

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Age of Enlightenment, industrialisation with capitalist production, and colonialism are interconnected historical phenomena. The growth of science as a mechanical stream and intellectual mode of reasoning postulated twofold reformations. While it transformed society from an agrarian economy with a feudal state into an industrial economy with a centralised bureaucratic state, its firm emphasis on positive knowledge as the only authentic source of knowledge diminished the conventional social prominence of traditional religions and challenged social morality. Rapid industrialisation in Europe augmented the pace of urbanisation, and new towns came into existence where workers from diverse countryside regions started to migrate in search of employment. These pluricultural and multilingual towns began to face difficulties, such as a deficiency of vehicular language between people of diverse linguistic backgrounds and the clash of identities, which consequently began to affect industrial production. At this juncture, the state-sponsored universal vis-à-vis uniform education gradually developed a *lingua franca*, cultivated a sense of belongingness and class fraternity among workers, and facilitated labour-capital industrial transactions. The linguistic homogeneity accompanied by cultural assimilation and sentiments of fraternity fostered the growth of nationalism: the linguistic, cultural, political, and economic homogenisation and standardisation of a geographical territory as a nation-state. This integration process horizontally separated the community into society and state. This separation widened the scope of functions and powers of the state and provided it with a reverential identity. The state became the epitome of identity and pride, culminating in the emergence and expansion of the nation-state epoch.

The nation-states of Europe conquered the backward regions of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, colonised their socio-political spaces, and established their hegemony as superior races. The process of modernisation and transformation postulated by the colonial states in these lands, a sense of deprivation among the natives as a conquered race, their political aspirations, and their vociferous acts of cultural revivalism, formulated a sense of integrated community among them, producing an anti-colonial fervour. Their emphasis on the amalgamation of socio-cultural revivalism and political reformation contributed to the birth of

nationalism in these regions. Most of these societies were decolonised and emerged as sovereign states by the middle of the 20th century under the flag of nationalism. The era of nationalism, since then, has continued to dominate domestic and international politics, despite the intellectual hope that the post-Cold War era would be an era of transnationalism, global fraternity, and democratic universalism. With the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001, the era of neo-nationalism started to surface in non-Western societies of the backward world.

1.2 Scope and Significance of the Study

Contrary to scholarly expectations that the 21st century would be a century of democracy, multicultural tolerance, freedom, global outlook, and universal brotherhood, the century exhibited a significant rise in populist politics, which celebrates authoritarian regimes, social repressiveness, oppressive collectivism, anti-universalist aspirations, supercilious ethnocentrism, and aggressive nationalism. Brexit, the electoral victory of Donald Trump, the substantial growth in authoritarian governments across countries, the refugee crisis, and, in that line, the consecutive electoral victories of the Hindutva nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, represent a tectonic shift in domestic and international politics. These emerging trends, indicating a popular shift towards conservative and centrist government over minimal state and liberal politics, stimulated a renewed interest in the study of nationalist thought.

This research work problematises the anatomy of Hindutva nationalism within the larger framework of India's nationalist discourse and contemporary socio-political transformations. This research work is the comparative analysis of three distinct ideological outlooks within the spectrum of Indian nationalism, i.e. Tilak's nationalism, Tagore's transnational universalism, and Hindutva's ultra-nationalism, and it studies the historical evolution of Indian nationalism within the timeframe of colonialism to postcolonialism. This research work problematises the metamorphic transmutation of nationalism within the landscape of India and examines its oscillation between the dichotomy of nationalism and universalism.

This research work attempts to examine the contemporary democratic backsliding in India and explores the historical shift from Hindu nationalism to Indian nationalism and from Indian nationalism to Hindutva nationalism. Contemporary Hindutva authoritarianism is venerated by nationalist populism, which is rooted in economic and social conservatism. The depleting resources, widening income gap, and rising unemployment push for authoritarian

leadership in place of consensus-based policy formulation. Within the same circumstances, the hegemonic classes are propagating sociocultural conservatism and ethno-religious parochialism to create an environment conducive to their hegemony. This research work attempts to locate conformities and contradictions in the thoughts and actions of contemporary Hindutva nationalism by comparing it with the ideas of Tilak and Tagore within the context of democracy, nationalism, and internationalism. While the contemporary Hindutva spokespersons (mis)interpret distinct strings of modern Indian thoughts and ideologies to validate its parochial tendencies and to conclude that Hindutva nationalism is the end-product of these (dis)similar thoughts, this research work attempts to locate anomalies in the Hindutva metanarrative in the context of India's democratic aspiration and understand the possible repercussions of Hindutva nationalism on Indian democracy and society.

1.3 Literature review

The discourse of nationalism and its likely future orientation have been widely discussed by scholars and academicians across the world. Ernest Gellner (1983), in *Nations and Nationalism*, argues that nationalism is the by-product of the social shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy. Nationalism attempts congruence of culture and state. The state-sponsored education and formalisation of language and communication within the framework of modernity promoted nationalism. In the Indian case, English education, English as *Lingua Franca*, and the English-educated middle class sowed the seed of pan-Indian nationalism. Benedict Anderson (2015), in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* asserted that print-capitalism contributed to the standardisation of language over dialects, which contributed to the cultivation of nationalist consciousness among members of the linguistic community. For him, a nation is an imagined community. In British India, pan-India colonialism, common bureaucracy, and modern literature contributed to the 'imagination' of India as a nation. Anthony D. Smith (1988), in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, argues that nations, though in their formation are modern, are based on ethnic materials of the past. Myths, common history, shared culture, descent, symbols, race, territory, etc., are core pre-modern elements which mobilise people on ethnic grounds to emerge as a nation-state. In colonial India, Hindu revivalism and Muslim revivalism on ethno-historic grounds contributed to the construction of two national consciousness and the eventual partition of the sub-continent. Also, the ethnic dimension and sense of historical exploitation formulated community

consciousness among the subaltern classes of India, i.e. low castes, untouchables, and tribals. Partha Chatterjee (1999), in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, analyses the Indian national movement within the conceptual framework of Gramsci's theory of hegemony and passive revolution. While the nationalist discourse was politically reformative, it was socially reactionary. Eric Hobsbawm (1994), in *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, explores nationalism as a modern phenomenon and correlates it to the socioeconomic and political transformations of that era. S. Irfan Habib (2017), in *Indian Nationalism: The Essential Writings,* presents a thematic account of the evolution of nationalist thought in India. Walter L. Adamson (1980) in *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* explores Gramsci's conception of cultural leadership, war of position, and ideological dominance.

G. Aloysius (2017), in *Nationalism Without a Nation in India,* argues that Indian nationalism was not a cohesive political movement and was rooted in preserving Brahminic hegemony and upper-caste interests. It diverted subalterns' focus from honest social liberation to nominal political independence. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, as a leader, represented political extremism, social orthodoxy, and eulogization of the Brahminic hierarchy. Parimala V. Rao (2011) evaluated Tilak as a patriarchal, pro-landlord, casteist, and anti-Muslim leader. Bhupendra Yadav (2011) held Tilak responsible for the communal riots of 1893-94 and for purposely encouraging the communalised celebrations of Shivaji Jayanti. Govind Pansare (2019), in *Who Was Shivaji?* presents Shivaji as a subaltern hero dedicated to the welfare of the common masses rather than of specific castes. He was a secular king, different from his image as a pro-Hindu king presented by the elite class. William Gould (2005), in *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, argues that heavy employment of Hindu rhetoric, symbolism, and iconography communalised Indian nationalism, eroded the secular discourse, and subsequently damaged the Hindu-Muslim relationship. While Tilak sowed the seeds of Hindu nationalism and vilified Muslims, the aggressive Hinduisation of nationalism in the 1930s divided the movement into Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism, and Indian nationalism. These hostilities continued to alter the course of democracy and nationalism in independent India. Stuart Corbridge & John Harriss (2003), in *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism, and Popular Democracy,* explore the rise of Hindu nationalism during the last decades of the 20th century and how it continues to affect the idea of India and its democratic virtues in the era of liberalisation and globalisation. Sadanand More (2018), in *Lokamanya to Mahatma: An Interdisciplinary Study*

in the Transition of Leadership, presents a colonial and nationalist history of Maharashtra by keeping Gandhi and Tilak as two opposite ideological ends of the framework and explores the consequential transition.

Rabindranath Tagore was an enlightened anarchist who not only criticised colonialism but also depicted nationalism in all its forms as a destructive force. Bidyut Chakrabarty (2021), in *Sociopolitical Thought of Rabindranath Tagore*, presents Tagore's idea of India and his contribution to the socio-economic emancipation of the lower society. Sugata Bose (2017), in *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood*, depicts nationalism surrounding the idea of a mother nation and presents Tagore's and others' cosmopolitan ideas, which synthesise nationalism and universalism. Amartya Sen (2006), in *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, examines Tagore's life from the prism of humanism and critique of ultranationalism. Mohammad A. Quayum's (2020) edited work *Tagore, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Perceptions, Contestations and Contemporary Relevance,* discusses Tagore's philosophy and its relevance in contemporary times. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2017), in *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation,* presents an intellectual biography of Tagore. Partha Ghose's (2019) edited work *Tagore, Einstein and the Nature of Reality: Literary and Philosophical Reflections* presents both these intellectuals' perceptions of the nature of reality. Subrata Mukherjee (2020), in *The Political Ideas of Rabindranath Tagore: Reflections of a Public Intellectual*, provides a concise overview of Tagore's mental universe.

Christophe Jaffrelot (2021), in *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, provides a detailed account of how, under Narendra Modi's leadership, India has emerged as a majoritarian, populist, authoritarian, and Hindu ethnic nation which criminalises the minorities, mainly Muslims and Christians, and transformed democracy into mobocracy. Shruti Kapila (2021), in *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age*, presents a fresh take on Tilak, Gandhi, Patel, Iqbal, and Savarkar in their contribution to the Indian Age. She explores Indian nationalist discourse and partition through the pivotal utilisation of the idea of violent fraternity and fraternal violence. Dinesh Narayanan (2025), in *The RSS and The Making of The Deep Nation,* presents the complex, contradictory, and multifaceted ideology of RSS and its aspirations for Hindu Rashtra. Jyotirmaya Sharma (2023), in *Hindutva: Exploring the idea of Hindu Nationalism,* asserts how the understandings of Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Savarkar on nation, Hindu, and Hinduism shaped the nationalist imagination of Indians. Tanika Sarkar (2024), in *Hindu Nationalism in India,* among other perspectives, examines Hindu nationalism from a feminist perspective.

Badri Narayan (2021), in the *Republic of Hindutva: How the Sangh is Reshaping Indian Democracy*, explores how the RSS has continued to evolve and redefine its ideology to suit contemporary electoral necessities and mobilise Hindu masses. Partha Chatterjee (2021), in *The Truths and Lies of Nationalism,* presents a liberal interpretation of the idea of India and asserts how contemporary ultranationalism and its parochialism threaten the social fabric of India. The wide range of literature available in India and outside has provided immense depth on nationalist thought in India and its progenitors. However, a comparative study of the nationalist ideology of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the transnationalist philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore has largely remained unexplored. This thesis seeks to bridge that gap by analysing their thought in relation to the contemporary nationalist discourse surrounding Hindutva.

1.4 Objectives

1. To analyse the thoughts of Tilak on nationalism and social conservatism.
2. To analyse the thoughts of Tagore on cosmopolitan transnationalism and universal humanism.
3. To compare the ideas of Tilak and Tagore in relation to contemporary Hindutva nationalism.
4. To evaluate the significance of their thoughts in contemporary India.

1.5 Hypotheses

1. Tagore's transnationalism is more compatible with heterogeneous India and its universalist aspirations.
2. Tilak's cultural nationalism is analogous to the Hindutva nationalism of contemporary India and its crude aspirations.
3. Contemporary Hindutva nationalism is incongruent with the liberal democratic ethos and spirit of harmony.

1.6 Methodology

The research work employs historical and philosophical approaches to delineate and analyse the ideas on the nation and nationalism as envisaged by B. G. Tilak and Rabindranath Tagore.

While mainly relying on theoretical works on nationalism, the study tries to compare and contrast the ontological and epistemological worlds of both thinkers with the support of the existing comparative works on Indic intellectual traditions. Thus, the study employs comparative methodology too. This is necessitated for the work to further explore the relevance of their ideas in contemporary India. This research work employs a qualitative approach to understand the ideology and action plan of the Hindutva nationalist government within the dichotomy of Tilak's and Tagore's thoughts in the context of democracy and diversity. Since the research work largely focuses on ideological comparison, the theoretical and philosophical approaches are utilised. This research work is a thematic comparative analysis of three different ideologies, i.e. Tilak's cultural nationalism, Tagore's humanist universalism, and Hindutva nationalism. The data collection included an enormous exploration of various books and scholarly articles.

1.7 Scheme of the Chapters

Chapter I: Introduction

The introduction chapter familiarises the area of study, establishes its objectives and hypothesis, and offers a comprehensive overview of the research. It situates the research work within the broader framework of Indian nationalist thought. This thesis is a juxtaposition study and relative evaluation of chronological and philosophical currents of nationalism in India. The chapter also highlights methodological exercises undertaken during the course of the study and reviews the existing relevant literature to postulate the research gap. The chapter also provides a concise overview of the scheme of all the chapters.

Chapter II: Theoretical Perspectives on Indian Nationalism

The chapter theoretically and thematically explores the historical account of Indian nationalism and the independence movement. It analyses the dichotomy of nationalist discourse within the Gramscian conceptual framework of hegemony and passive revolution. The ideological paradoxes and dialectical relationship between moderates and extremists are discussed within the institutional framework of the Indian National Congress. Similarly, the 'Muslim' question is pursued from the prism of Hindu majoritarian nationalism and religious vertical polarisation. The chapter asserts that the third front of subalterns, i.e. low castes, Dalits, and women, was

neutralised through nominal inclusiveness, false egalitarianism, and Hindu-Muslim binarisation. The chapter also delves into the complexities that erupted over the social and political reforms and the democratisation of the nation by the de-hegemonisation of traditional elites. The chapter briefly attempts to locate Gandhian thought and language debate within the scale of communalism and secularism.

Chapter III: Bal Gangadhar Tilak on Nation and Nationalism

This chapter explores the ideational universe of Tilak and his philosophy of swaraj and nationalism. The chapter attempts to analyse Tilak's position on the question of social change, Brahminic hegemony, and patriarchy. The chapter presents Tilak's multifaceted thought as a subtextual endorsement of Hindu nationalism, which reached its zenith during the last years of the freedom movement and re-emerged with new vigour as Hindutva during the post-colonial period. Tilak was the first proper Indian leader who transformed the discourse of cultural consciousness into cultural nationalism, emphasising India's right to self-determination. The chapter presents Tilak's extremist stand on political demands and his reactionary stand on the question of social reformation. The chapter provides insights into Tilak's perception of Muslims as aggressors and how his communally charged journalism and speeches contributed to riots and communal tensions. The chapter also focuses on Tilak's celebration of the Shivaji and Ganesh festivals and his presentation of Shivaji as a pro-Hindu king.

Chapter IV: Rabindranath Tagore on State-Centric Nationalism and Universalist Aspirations

This chapter delves into the mental universe of Tagore and explores his idea of cosmopolitan India. Tagore's condemnation of nationalism, the nation-state, and authoritarian statism is explored in this chapter. Tagore was a hardcore universalist and humanist, and his philosophy of universal humanism is presented within the continuum of transnationalism. This chapter provides an account of Tagore's village reconstruction programme at Sriniketan, where he engaged in various socio-economic activities to train villagers in building self-dependent village communities. Tagore's holistic-humanistic educational endeavours at Santiniketan and the virtues of Visva-Bharati are also explored in this chapter. While the nationalist leadership viewed decolonisation as a precursor to social regeneration and the formation of an ideal

society, Tagore perceived political or national questions as superfluous discourse and emphasised looking into authentic social issues that impact the day-to-day life of the people. His condemnation of efforts towards standardisation, homogenisation, and centralisation and his advocacy for creative imagination and social plurality are explored in this chapter.

Chapter V: Tilak's Nationalism, Tagore's Transnationalism, and Contemporary Hindutva: A Comparative Analysis

This chapter is fundamentally a trichotomous analysis of the discourse of nationalism within the context of India. This chapter predominantly investigates the themes and structure of contemporary Hindutva nationalism in relation to India's spontaneous socio-cultural plurality, the cosmopolitan vision of independent India, and the virtues of liberal-constitutional democracy. The Hindutva nationalism of the BJP government is comparatively analysed with the nationalist creed of Tilak and the transnationalist philosophy of Tagore. The chapter delves into the emerging concerns in India, such as rising authoritarianism and cultural intolerance, skyrocketing populism, condemnation of intelligentsia and rationalism, glorification of statism, vilification of Muslims, and propagation of fear and social anxiety. The chapter also deliberates on conceptions such as Akhand Bharat, Hindu Rashtra, etc.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This chapter summarises and provides a comprehensive overview of the thesis and explores its fundamental arguments in relation to the hypotheses and objectives. It establishes that the contemporary rise of ultranationalism in India, which is both reactionary and undemocratic, is detrimental to India's social fabric and liberal polity. It highlights the significance of inculcating scientific temperament, critical inquiry, intellectual veracity, liberal virtues, egalitarian ideals, and a positively tolerant conscience among the people. The chapter attempts to understand the repercussions of the ultra-nationalist surge in India on its social fabric and democracy.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Perspectives on Indian Nationalism

2.1 Understanding the Theoretical Foundation of Nation and Nationalism

The doctrine of nationalism has remained a matter of scholarly inquiry since the 19th century. The questions which are frequently raised in this context include: what promotes the sentiments of nationalism among people? Do the elite perform a strategic role in these constructions? Is nationalism a natural phenomenon or an artificial and deliberate construct of the ruling class? Or is it a natural outcome of modernity and technological advancements? What significance do ethnicity, culture, language, and religion encompass in the trajectory of nationalism? Is the nation-state an end of political evolution, or is it a transitional phase? Is nationalism a primordial entity and an artefact of antiquity resurrected under modern conditions, or is it purely a byproduct of modernity? Though various scholars analysed the discourse of nationalism and produced reliable theoretical deductions, their assessment remained subject to further inquiry. This chapter attempts to explore the theoretical foundation of nationalism and examine the discourse of Indian nationalism within the continuum of cultural hegemony.

Historical analysis of the social existence of humanity indicates that cultural and ethnic consciousness were persistently utilised by people to assert their collective identity. These factors fostered social affinity among members and substantiated the organic structure of the community. Despite its ability to develop solidarity, ethnocultural rudiments could build mass communities during the agrarian age. The Age of Enlightenment, modernity, and the Industrial Revolution instilled new political-national consciousness among people and contributed to the gradual dissolution of the feudal states in Europe. The rapidly emerging middle class started to explore rudiments of language, culture, and territory with renewed interest and affection. The linguistic national consciousness contributed to the collapse of multi-lingual empires like Habsburg, and demands were made to redraw the state borders on linguistic parameters.

Nationalist discourse was also the outcome of classical liberalism. Ideals such as liberty, equality, fraternity, individualism, and democracy challenged the long-survived practices of nobility, monarchy, and class privileges. These revolutionary ideas substantiated the conception of popular sovereignty and social contract, which started to uproot monarchy and nobility from its foundation. During this tectonic shift in the structure of the state and

power, to protect the class interests, the elite class propagated the ideology of nationalism -- a neo-collectivism in the age of individualism. It filled people with great devotion towards national territory and national government. While one perspective holds that nationalism is an elite construct, the other holds that nationalism is a byproduct of democracy and popular sovereignty. The following paragraphs summarise the theorisation of nation and nationalism by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Anthony D. Smith.

Ernest Gellner in his 'Nations and Nationalism' asserts that nationalism is an outcome of modernisation and industrialisation and as a principle; it 'holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). The territorial boundaries of the nation and the sovereign borders of the state should be compatible with each other to achieve perfect amalgamation. Nationalism envisages that the political boundaries of the state should include all the members of a perceived nation. But often, the boundaries, besides mostly failing to include all national members, also end up including some foreigners who do not share the culture with the majority (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). Nations are not natural communities waiting to be awakened from slumber but are phenomenal formations of modern societies; hence, it is nationalism which gives birth to a nation and not vice versa (Gellner, 1983, p. 55).

According to Gellner, nations are modern constructs thoughtfully initiated by elites to meet the needs of industrial societies. Nations are contingent and artificial and are not real, objective, and natural, waiting to be awakened (Walicki, 1998, p. 611). Nationalism is a purposely executed transformative process which consequently cultivates national consciousness. Hence, Gellner (1983, p. 12) asserts that industrial societies strengthen boundaries between nations rather than between classes as existed in pre-industrial societies.

Gellner argues that when agrarian societies shifted into industrial societies, they needed a standard context-free language for the smooth transmission of ideas between different blocks of workers and between workers and industrialists. Language was standardised, uniformised, and homogenised for industrial and economic purposes through state-sponsored education. Nationalism also propagated the establishment of a homogenous society through national high culture. Earlier, the agrarian societies constituted multiple wild or low cultures, and elites and peasantry did not share the culture. However, with the dawn of industrialisation, the high culture became necessary for its efficient functioning. Through sociopolitical engineering such as universal education, standard language, and bureaucracy, wild cultures were replaced by high culture. The garden or high cultures are modified hybrids, which are inherently fragile

unlike wild cultures and need the support of the state for their survival. Similarly, the agrarian man is like a wild species which can survive in natural conditions, but the industrial man is a bred species that is too frail to breathe in a natural environment and can survive and function only in a synthetic environment (Gellner, 1983, pp. 50-52).

To train industrial workers in the standard language and keep them harmonious with each other through social fraternity, the state promoted its own sets of myths and symbols. Gellner was loyal to British structural-functionalism and attempted to find a structural model between nation, culture, and state. Because of his reliance on the dynamics of culture, Hann calls him a structural culturalist (Hann, 2001, p. 175).

Indian nationalism is also a product of modernity and colonial history. While it united the non-elite to overthrow British colonisation and pre-colonial social hierarchy to establish an egalitarian order, under the hoax of the independence movement, Indian elites used nationalism to overthrow the colonial regime and re-legitimise their traditional hegemony and old social order under modern conditions.

Benedict Anderson in 'Imagined Communities' observes that nations are not physical realities but socially retained collective imagination. He called a nation an imagined community as its members imagine themselves as belonging to a homogenous community despite not knowing the majority of them personally (Anderson, 2015, p. 6). Notwithstanding the existence of social hierarchies and inequalities in the nation, which divides rulers from the ruled and haves from the haves not, national unity survives on the spirit of horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 2015, p.7). Renaissance and Enlightenment validated the separation of religion and politics and advocated rationality over faith. The failure of religion to provide sensible explanations to the absurdity and fatality of life leads to its decline and this created a void in the life of man. The dusk of religion and the dawn of nationalism are interconnected phenomena (Anderson, 2015, pp. 10-11). Like religion, nationalism provides a sacred identity to its members and fosters a sense of belongingness. For the same reason, many people across the world convince themselves to kill or die for the sake of the nation (Anderson, 2015, p. 7).

Anderson associates the birth of nationalism with the rise of print capitalism. By 1600, the Print media had emerged as one of the earliest forms of capitalist enterprise in Europe. From 1500-1600, most of the books were printed in the Latin language, which had elite and sacred status and were sold across the continent. However, despite its holy stature, Latin could be read only by a tiny minority and by 1600 CE when the print entrepreneurs ran out of

customers, they began to look for vernaculars that could be read by a majority to replace Latin (Anderson, 2015, pp. 37-38). However, the task was not commercially effortless as these vernaculars lacked syntaxes and standardisation and had various dialects. Over the period, analogous idiolects and patois were assembled using syntaxes to construct a print language that could be read by a larger population. In this process, dialects extremely close to the print language gradually assimilated into it, abandoning their distinct identity, while dialects far dissimilar from the print language lost their relevance and remained confined to secondary status, where they neither received academic attention nor were elevated for political purposes (Anderson, 2015, pp. 42-45). The language factor, even today, constitutes a pioneering element of nationalist identity and is revered as sacred.

The print vernacular played a crucial role in establishing the fraternal consciousness among countrymen. 'These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community' (Anderson, 2015, p. 44). The printed material provided fixity to the language and status of antiquity and contributed to the growth of national consciousness. Thompson argues that nationally minded philologists, to preserve minority languages in the age of print and nationalism, constructed the grammar of these languages and pushed for their official use, while nationalist historians compiled histories of their nations (Thompson, 2015, p. 157).

Anthony D. Smith (1988), in 'The Ethnic Origins of Nations', argues that nations, by their origin, are not the product of modernity. The modern imaginings of a nation are based on pre-modern ethnic materials which are adapted by a community, possessing a substantial and legitimate part of the territory, to construct a universal individuality and proclaim sovereignty. Hence, Smith (1984, p. 289) asserts that though nationalist ideology and movements began to emerge in the modern era, the identities on which they nurture and grow are ancient and preserved in memories and symbols, which, in an ideal scenario, can fuel nation-making movements. The myths of ethnicity perpetuated by a community may not be factually accurate, historically legitimate, and logically acceptable. Yet their utility is measured by their ability to construct and sustain a narrative on the distinct history, antiquity, and individuality of an *ethnie* or ethnic community. Ethnic myths and symbols formulate a sense of belongingness, continuity, and pride among members. Defining an *ethnie*, Smith (1984, p. 284) argues that it is a '…social group with alleged common ancestry and shared history, one or more elements of distinctive culture, a sense of territorial association and an active solidarity'. There are various ethnic elements exploited to foster lucid social solidarities.

Each *ethnie* needs a name, an emblem of its essence and distinctiveness. The spectacle of name represents meanings, power, and pride for the members. In that name, they experience the magic of existence and assurance of survival (Smith, 1988, p. 23). Hindu nationalists during the independence movement emphasised nomenclatures such as *Sanatan, Hindu, Aryavarta, Hindustan,* and *Bharatiya*, among others to define the Hindu ethnic background of India. The myth of common descent rationalises the belief in common ancestry. It instils '…a sense of tribal belonging through common family ties, rather than any sense of genetic and blood ties' (Smith, 1988, p. 24). The ethnic myths are supplied through symbols, signs, poems, ballads, paintings, historiography, iconography, stories, epics, slogans, etc. The descent myths are '…of spatial and temporal origins, of migrations, of ancestry and filiation, of the golden age, of decline and exile and rebirth' (Smith, 1988, p. 25).

Shared history is another element of ethnic identity. Historical narratives are therefore developed with full emotionalism and nostalgia to connect those who are living with those who are dead and those who are yet to be born. Scientific historiography often contradicts the triumphalist history cherished by people which presents the past in a linear grand narrative, a journey from hardship to ultimate victory. The romanticised account of shared history helps to generate ethnic cohesion. Similarly, shared culture and association with a specific territory constitute the elements of ethnic identity. Smith (1988, p. 26) states that cultural traits define how the members are socially alike. The much-insisted cultural traits include language, religion, customs, laws, institutions, moral codes, folklore, architecture, dress, food, music, art, colour, and physique. The territory is treated as sacred, a land of pilgrimage, a place of origin, and a homeland, where one lives or yearns to return (Smith, 1988, pp. 28-29). In India, the territory is revered by cultural nationalists as *Matru bhumi, Pitru bhumi, Karma bhumi, Dharma bhumi,* and *Punya bhumi*. Interestingly, one of the reasons behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Hindu nationalist Nathuram Godse was Gandhi's acceptance of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, which to Godse, constituted a homeland of Hindus.

2.2 Culture and National Consciousness in India

Unlike language and religion, which are sufficiently apparent and concrete, the vagueness of the cultural sphere makes it an ideal material to mobilise masses to assert nationhood. The Indian nationalist movement used language, religion, and similar elements under the cover of culture to construct a national consciousness during the anti-colonial resistance.

In the aftermath of the Indian rebellion of 1857, a socio-cultural and political awakening began to develop in urban pockets of British India, mainly constituting middle-class intelligentsia who mostly came from Brahmin and privileged classes. This middle class included people such as lawyers, teachers, writers, and poets as well as spiritual and religious leaders. The movement received external support from Indian traders, merchants, and industrialists. Though this multi-dimensional movement of loosely connected associations started to become vibrant during the second half of the 19th century, its origin was embedded in the changes that occurred during the early decades of the 19th century. These developments principally include the spread of English education and railways across India as well as the exposure of the Indian educated class to Western thought, particularly the ideas of Rousseau, Mill, Locke, and the social contract. Archaeological, linguistic, cultural, and historical research conducted by European scholars in India developed nostalgia among natives towards their history. Indian nationalists were inspired by the politico-national movements of Europe that included the national unification of England and France, the European nationalist resistance to Napoleon's expansionism, Greeks fighting against the Turks for political independence, and the role of Bismarck and Cavour in creating independent motherlands. The middle class passionately learned about the mass appeal of Giuseppe Mazzini, Louis Kossuth, and Charles Parnell (Khare, 1989, pp. 536-538). Additionally, German orientalism and Indology, which glorified ancient Sanskrit knowledge, developed self-esteem among educated elites. The cultural consciousness fostered conservation instincts among the middle class in response to the imperial interference in the religio-cultural sphere, conversions to Christianity, and subaltern social reformation declaring religion and culture as the sources of indignity and oppression. The centrality of Hindu cultural territoriality formulated a sense of pan-India Hindu community which subsequently contributed to the birth of cultural nationalism in India.

Contrary to popular understanding, which divided secular and communal nationalist discourse into binaries, secular (Indian) nationalism and cultural (Hindu) nationalism were dialectically interconnected and functioned according to the needs and nature of the circumstances. Moreover, Indian secular nationalism acted as a façade to hide the crudeness of Hindu cultural assertions and present it in a sophisticated manner inside the institutional bodies. Hence, both these ideologies emerged within the same discursive space and competed within mental frameworks (Zavos, 1999, p.2271). The nationalists aimed to construct India as a sovereign nation-state by unifying the territories colonised by the British in the Indian subcontinent. Socio-cultural unification was a prerequisite to its political unification. Hence,

thinkers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Mahatma Gandhi, Lokmanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, and Swami Vivekananda stressed immensely on forming social cohesion among communities divided by the castes, creeds, and language.

The movement received momentum in the form of a call for political reflections, national self-determination, and religious-cultural revivalism to resist foreign rule antithetical to indigenous culture, values, and customs. As its philosophical derivations were ingrained in Hinduism, the movement became popular as political Hinduism and Neo-Hinduism (Schlensog, 2007, p. 164). National movements are primarily cultural in their nature. Culture is an institutionalised framework devised to conserve the traditional structure of a functional society. This established structure of India began to face internal and external challenges in the form of *laissez-faire* liberalism, modernity, individualism, and capitalist industrialisation. Beneath such circumstances, nationalism is a course of action executed by the culture for its survival under modern conditions. Ideology is thus a '…facet of culture, a re-interpretation appropriated as a means of establishing and defending that culture in the face of rapid change' (Zavos, 1999, p. 2271). In the synthesis of culture and power within the discourse of nationalism, the intellectuals and elites play a crucial role. In the context of culture and nationalism Said (1995, cited in Sen, 2002) argues that culture promoted through nationalist discourse fosters xenophobia and archaism. It imposes relative moral and intellectual behavioural codes which decry multiculturalism and cross-culturalism.

Indian nationalist history can be roughly divided into four eras. Between the 1750s and 1850s, the educated middle class appreciated the English administration, English education, and the British sense of justice, viewing it as a gift of God to India. Between the 1850s and 1890s, mainly in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857, the forces of cultural nationalism began to appear on social and political fronts. On the social front, the thoughts of Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Vivekananda contributed to cultivating the consciousness of a homogenous community. On the political front, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and others transformed these social aspirations into a political movement which aimed to construct a modern nation-state with its roots ingrained in premodern culture. What was the preservation of traditions to Lal, Bal, Pal, Gandhi, and Annie Besant, was social exploitation to subalterns (Aloysius, 2017, p. 124). The cultural assertions were secularised and institutionalised when a pan-India socio-political organisation known as the Indian National Congress came into existence in 1885, providing a common platform for diverse nationalist thoughts. Between the 1890s and 1915, the national movement suffered from

internal conflicts over the right course of resistance, which divided the Congress into moderates and extremists. Similarly, while moderates gave precedence to social reforms over political reforms, the extremists prioritised political reforms over social change.

Gandhi entered the national movement during the second decade of the 20th century, opening a new chapter in the nation's history. He succeeded in merging moderatism and extremism, reformism and revivalism, and secularism and sectarianism under a single movement. Under Gandhi, the movement achieved mass mobilisation and reached the rural corners of India. Considering the nationalist movement an elite discourse, the Dalit-Bahujan leadership developed a separate movement for the social liberation and empowerment of the depressed class. Its main ideologues, i.e. Jyotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Periyar, distrusted the nationalist movement due to its *savarna* tendencies. While the elite's demands for public employment, political representation, position in legislative councils, and zamindars' right to exemptions from land impositions were frequently raised, the Bahujan's appeal for access to education, public employment, protection from exploitation, and freedom from ignorance did not receive serious attention (McCully, 1966, as cited in Aloysius, 2017, p.123). Muslim revivalism and nationalism parallelly emerged as a counter-movement to Hindu nationalism.

Cultural nationalists perceived India as a primordial nation. Perry Anderson, in his book *The Indian Ideology*, argues that India was not even a properly demarcated geographical expression until the Europeans observed it in that way (Habib, 2017, p. 4). If nationhood is defined in terms of political unity or social mobility, neither the whole of the subcontinent was ever ruled by a single empire, nor did the caste-compartmentalised society experience social cohesion and fraternity. Cultural nationalists argue that despite caste divisions, the society was still united under the umbrella of Hinduism transcending caste borders. This argumentation overlooks the fact that Hinduism as an organised religion emerged during the colonial period. To defend the antiquity of the nation, Hindu nationalists argue that in Ashoka's inscriptions (3rd Century B.C.) and Kharavela's Hathigumpha inscriptions (1st Century B.C.), there is a usage of the term *Jambudvipa* and *Bharata* to refer to the subcontinent, respectively. Xuan Zhuang described this country as 'Indu' in the seventh century (Habib, 2017, pp. 4-5). Habib argues that these terms were vaguely applied to describe the region without precise frontiers and not in the sense of a unified nation. The idea of the Indian nation came into explicit understanding only after the revolt of 1857 (Habib, 2017, p. 5).

Cultural nationalism in India has been a most successful model of nationalism because of its ability to appeal to emotions and mobilise diverse social groups. Within caste-based social culture, cultural nationalism erects a parallel structure of society where the divided masses are treated as equal members. Hindu cultural nationalism did not erase social divisions but produced an illusion of unity necessary for a mass movement. The question of who is 'Indian' was resolved by indicating Christians and Muslims as others, outsiders, and odds. This phenomenon not only shifted the force of nationalism from the provincial to the national level but unified various *dharmic* sects under the umbrella term 'Hindus', which gave these sects a coherent religious identity and led to the foundation of political religion and religious nationalism in India.

The upper caste nationalists began to associate national culture with the Aryan race. While the idea of Hinduism was attempting to bridge the gap between *savarnas* and *avarnas*, Aryanism was polarising upper castes and Bahujans. Thapar (1996, pp. 9-10) argues that the upper-caste nationalists were emphasising the race factor to legitimise their superior Aryan origin and lineage. While they used the Aryan factor to racially distinguish them from subalterns and build racial equality with the coloniser, the race division was also exposing parallel class division within India. Hardliners went on to claim that the treatment Aryan Nazis inflicted on Semite Jews should be imposed by Aryan Hindus on Muslims. At this juncture, Bal Gangadhar Tilak's works, i.e. *The Orion* and *The Artic Home in the Vedas,* attempted to associate the Hindu Vedic civilisation with the Aryan race.

Aryans were argued to have descended on this land from the regions adjacent to the Northern Hemisphere, bringing culture, civilization, and enlightenment to India. Brahminic culture was treated as progeny of Aryan culture, thus validating Brahmin hegemony. Sanskrit, the alleged language of Indo-Aryans, was hailed as the mother of Indian languages and storehouse of culture. Terms like *Bharatvarsh, Aryavarth, Hindubhoomi,* etc. came into public use (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 145-146). Max Muller's study of Sanskrit texts and Vedas was used to defend the Aryan genealogy of the upper castes. Keshab Chandra Sen viewed British rule in India as a reunion of parted cousins. Dayanand Saraswati's Arya Samaj was described as a society of the Aryan race. The Aryans who migrated to the east, that is from Iran to India, were described as spiritual, meditative, and focused on religion and philosophy (Thapar, 1996, pp. 5-8). While the racial equation offered a sense of superiority to Indians, to distinguish themselves from the British and assert national self-determination, they relied on the binarization of culture. While the West was indicated as materialist, competitive, and

individualist, the East was defined as spiritualist, harmonious, organic, and collectivist (Aloysius, 2017, p. 146). European culture was shown as incompatible with humanity.

The ideological hostility between secular and sectarian nationalism remained pertinent throughout the independence movement. While Hindu nationalism and Indian nationalism were described as antithetical as the former is associated with sectarianism and exclusiveness, and the latter is defined as secular, inclusive, and inclusive, there remained a paradoxical interrelationship between both. Sometimes secular and cosmopolitan aspirations can be traced in the ideas of cultural nationalists, and ethnocentrism can be detected within liberal streams. Cultural nationalists like Tilak, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo have deliberated on universalism and the role India should play towards the spiritual progress of the world. Aurobindo considered India's independence as a milestone in the destiny of the entire humanity (Singh, 2002, p. 27). Vivekananda used religion in nationalism only to ignite a mass movement. As a matter of fact, Vivekananda, Tilak, and Gandhi are part of the same philosophy. He was equally nationalist and internationalist (Gokhale, 1964, pp. 41-42).

While European nationalism was a product of modernity, democratic revolutions, and liberalism, Asian and African nationalism, in contrast, advocated traditionalism, orthodoxy, religious fundamentalism, illiberalism, and anti-modern ideologies (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 120). The foremost paradox of Indian nationalism exists in its inherent contradictions with the dynamics of modernity, though it evolved under conditions which were essentially modern. The nationalist discourse cherished the ideals of liberty, democracy, and popular sovereignty during its fight against the colonial regime. However, its admiration of traditional social order, which customarily naturalises social hierarchy, social slavery, and exploitation of the depressed classes and its deep urge to preserve it, was contradictory to its progressive aspirations. These ideational ambiguities can be best explained within the framework of passive revolution.

The conventional social order of India, which was structuralised as culture, was a class hierarchy institutionalised to preserve the interests and hegemony of the elite class. Any progressive reformation within this structure was detrimental to the established hegemony. Using the Gramscian framework of passive revolution, Chatterjee (1999, p. 6) argues that the nationalist bourgeoisie had divided the nationalist discourse into the binary of spiritual (indigenous) and material (alien). In the spiritual and cultural domain, which was the inner aspect and essential mark of national identity, it denounced colonial interference, claiming India (East) to be spiritually and culturally superior to the West. However, in the material

domain, i.e. economy, politics, science and technology, which was an outer aspect, acknowledging the advancement of Western materialism, it agreed to imitate European ideas and institutions. Hence, the national movement constituted the elites' efforts to protect class privileges in the name of national culture. Thus, the cultural hegemony had to be retained by insulating the spiritual domain and declaring the material domain insignificant. Chatterjee (1999, p. 49) observes that the movement was both reformist and reactionary. While it supported the structural reformation of the social and state institutions to make them compatible with modernity and capitalist developments, it resisted change in the cultural domain as the class hegemony was institutionalised through culture, and any revolutionary change in the cultural setup would jeopardise class dominance. Hence, the question of change and status quo was settled considering the class interests of the traditional native elites.

The nationalist bourgeoisie merged the modern political system and the traditional social order to naturalise its power position, and the state itself made the institution of imposing class dominance in its modern avatar. While the polity was indigenised, the social order was partly modernised. It was a passive revolution because while it opposed colonial exploitation, it remained silent on internal exploitations executed through the caste system. Similarly, while it was determined to reform the structure of the social and state institutions to make them compatible with modern conditions, it maintained an ambiguous and disinterested stand on sociocultural change i.e. eradication of caste hierarchy and formation of egalitarian and liberal society. Hence, Aloysius (2017, p. 131) observes that the nationalist leadership, which predominantly came from the elite class, was concerned with the transfer of power but disinterested in the redistribution of power.

The cultural resistance to colonialism began much before the national movement commenced against colonial rule. Whether they were outright religious-cultural nationalists like Lal-Bal-Pal and Aurobindo, or humanists like Vivekananda, or post-modernists like Gandhi and Tagore, they associated the spiritual domain with the soul and the material domain with the body, declaring the soul or Indian culture as immortal, eternal, and supreme against European values. Liberalism and modernity, which were incompatible with Indian caste-class compartmentalisation, were alleged to cause the alienation of individuals from society. While the nationalist thought permitted imitation of the modern Western political economy, paradoxically, it reiterated that modernity and Western ethos were unsuitable to Indic traditions. Similarly, while it viewed nationalism and traditional social practices as two sides of the same coin, at times, it regarded the latter as obstacles to national unification. Such

confused distrust of European values can be observed in Gandhian thought. Gandhi argued that if the European mind has to choose between justice and self-interest, it will choose the latter (Mukherjee, 2009, p.35). The nationalist dichotomy entered even family and gender spheres. Chatterjee (1999, p.9) observes that the new Indian middle-class woman was permitted to modernise herself by receiving an English education, and hitherto, she was also expected to retain signs of traditionality and project herself different from Western women. Bagchi (1985, p. WS-59) argues that the Bengali nationalists were inspired by Auguste Comte's positivism and glorification of womanhood. Comte argued that order and progress can exist together and without the support of women and the proletariat class, the programme of social regeneration would fail. These ideas possibly contributed to the emergence of the idea of the nation as a mother and also the humanist philosophy of Vivekananda emphasising the necessity of social emancipation of masses submerged in ignorance and hunger.

Language, literature, and art forms such as painting and drama played significant roles in shaping the dynamics of national culture and cultural nationalism. The 19th-century nationalists were English-educated bilinguals. Though they used English for administrative purposes, they profoundly aspired to elevate the native language(s) as one of the ascendent realms of culture. Magazines, newspapers, journals, printing presses, publishing houses, and literary societies played a dominant role in standardising the vernaculars to enable them to manage the complex affairs of modern culture (Chatterjee, 1999, p.7). Nationalists aimed to remove the English language from public space as well as from the inner sphere, where the intrusion of foreign elements was strongly ostracised. Though they concretised the vernaculars at the provincial level, India being a multi-linguistic region, the efforts at formalising a national language did not receive enough success. At this juncture in the nationalist movement, provincial or linguistic nationalism started to contrast with pan-India nationalism. However, since the majority of the prominent nationalists were part of both these nationalisms, the provincial aspirations were surrendered for a larger vision.

The poetry and drama written during this era played a crucial role in distinguishing what was Indian from European. There was a sudden rise in the writing and performance of dramas in distinct Indian languages, particularly Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi. Sometimes, the themes of these dramas were related to the condemnation of English rule and European culture alongside cherishing Indian values, family structure, and obedient womanhood. Elites 'who lost political and economic power, turned to art and the cultural sphere as a way to reclaim power' (Deshpande, 1999, & Sathe, 2011, as cited in Ajotikar, 2021, p. 108). In Maharashtra,

Marathi *sangeet natak* (musical drama) became a platform to voice out silent protest against the British rule and an identity quest for the elite class who had lost political power (Deshpande, 1999, as cited in Ajotikar, 2021, p. 108). The *sangeet nataks* written between the 1840s and 1930s were themed on Hinduism, Hindu mythologies, *Puranic* stories, Mahabharata, and Ramayana. They delivered the message of cultural nationalism and rationalised Brahminic hegemony through entertainment. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were shown in a positive light and the social order based on *chaturvarna* was glorified. The traditional dance forms like *Lavani*, *Bhand*, and *Tamasha*, and oral performance traditions of outcastes and low castes were ostracised as uncultured to hegemonies *sangeet nataks* (Ajotikar, 2021, p. 109). The Marathi theatre tried to marginalise traditional subaltern performances through the high culture of *nataks*. Writers, producers, directors, musicians, and actors of these *nataks* often used to be Brahmins.

Besides language and drama, an Indic form of painting also began to emerge in 19th century India, whose aesthetics were largely non-Western. These paintings were a synergy of aesthetics and nativity. In a revivalist way, the artists reintroduced the styles of painting popular during the Mughal and medieval eras to sideline the European style of painting. Abanindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore were few among the prominent artists of contemporary Bengal. The paintings of this era were deeply influenced by feminine archetypes. Ranging from seductive womanhood to divine mystic motherhood, these themes showcased sensuality and divinity as dominant expressions within the discourse of Bengali Renaissance and nationalism. Similarly, Ravi Varma's paintings brought ancient classics and themes to life, enabling the masses and elites alike to visualise the cultural heritage and experience the ancient within the modern. His artwork fostered cultural unity and national consciousness among the people. Thakurta (1991, p. WS94) observes:

> …Ravi Varma's paintings also fed into the central concerns of Indian nationalism... they selected from these 'classics' a particular set of lyric and romantic themes in keeping with its aesthetics of 'high art'; they located 'culture' and 'tradition' in certain iconic images of Indian womanhood; most significantly, these paintings shaped its images of women and mythic heroines as ideal national prototypes.

Despite the attempts to prevent foreign influence on Indian art, the art, drama, music, and paintings were influenced by foreign elements. Hence, there was a sense of volatility over the indigenous authenticity of nationalist literature and art. Dwijendralal Roy's poem '*Banga amar, janani amar, dhatri amar, amar desh*' and Atul Prasad Sen's '*Utho go Bharatlakshmi'* in composition were influenced by European melodies (Bose, 2017, p. 12). The nationalist

discourse was derivative in nature. The success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and Lenin's advocacy of the right to self-determination for all colonised nations offered a sense of legitimacy to India's national struggle (Aloysius, 2017, p. 188).

Throughout the span of the national movement, linguistic-provincial nationalism was sporadically progressing alongside pan-India nationalism in different parts of India. This is true of the ethno-national aspirations of Tamils, Bengalis, and Maharastrians, among others (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 142-143). However, the pan-India territorial uniformity of British colonialism and overlapping of identity factors among both these nationalisms, i.e. pan-Indian and regional, left the regional aspirations without any 'unique selling point'. During the later stage, the ethnolinguistic regional nationalism was sidelined by Hindu-Muslim religious nationalism.

2.3 Hindu, Hinduism, and the Idea of India

With the rise of Muslim national consciousness, Hindu nationalism replaced the vagueness of culture with the precision of religious nationalism. The term Hindu, in the context of nationalism, carried both inclusivist and exclusivist dimensions. While it included Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains within the broader Hindu identity and affirmed their status as national, it excluded Muslims and Christians as outsiders. While the former were considered national as their holy land lay within India, the latter were excluded as their holy land fell outside the territory of India. Aloysius (2017, pp. 152-153) observes that cultural nationalists attempted to define Hindu and Hinduism within the Brahminical trajectory and the subcontinent was explicitly described as a Hindu civilisation. Both Hinduness and Indianness were considered synonymously.

Zavos asserts that Lal Chand, the founder of the Hindu Sabha and associate of Arya Samaj, argued that instead of pondering on the social and cultural dimensions of Hindu identity and contemplating Hindu plurality, they must be consolidated as a single political community. Against the backdrop of the Morley-Minto reforms, which guaranteed a separate electorate for Muslims, Chand asserted that the Hindu community must shed their secular cosmopolitanism, which emanates from a self-erasure attitude and establish a counter-hegemony. The self-abnegation and self-denying attitude of Hindus towards politics, along with their tendency to allow claims of other communities to take precedence over their own, have been responsible for their lagging (Zavos, 1999, p. 2273).

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee argued that the cynicism of Hindus towards power and their adherence to the philosophy of *vairagya* pondered by Sankhya have been responsible for their downfall and subjugation (Chatterjee, 1999, p.56). Likewise, Tilak blamed the renunciatory philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya, which preaches inaction, for the downfall of India as it treats the phenomenal world as *maya* or less than real, and *moksha* or liberation from this illusory world as the goal of mankind. He asserted that renunciation of all actions which belong to and bind us to this world is the message of the Bhagavad Gita (Harvey, 1986, p. 322).

To describe India as a Hindu nation and construct ethnic affinities among Hindus for political unification, various Hindu symbols and allegories were popularised. From Gods to texts, and from rivers to mountains, everything was religionised and politicised to substantiate the narrative of Hindu nationalism. Leaders like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh, V. D. Savarkar, and organisations like Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha were focused on categorising the Hindus as a homogenous nation (Gould, 2005, p. 38). In Bengal, nationalism culminated into a cult and fostered terrorism when the nation was apotheosised as *Kali*. In the northern province, Hinduism and Hindu symbols, festivals, etc., took centre stage in developing the idea of a Hindu nation by associating religious myths with the political realities of the time (Gould, 2005, p. 24). In Maharashtra, Shivaji's legacy came to be presented as Hindu glory, victory over Muslims, and a symbol of anti-colonial resistance.

Vivekananda and Aurobindo aspired to spread Hinduism as the future religion of the world (Heehs, 1997, p. 120). Gandhi claimed that there is sufficient space within Hinduism to include Christianity and Islam (Gould, 2005, p. 38). Congress upheld Vedantic idealism as its official philosophy. The universalist definition of Hinduism was self-contradictory; while it aspired to embrace universal humanism, it paradoxically held Hindu culture and India as superior to others. While nationalists proclaimed Hindu secularism by embracing Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains within the Hindu confederacy, they maintained silence on the denial to offer the same treatment to Muslims and Christians, especially in terms of rights and citizenship.

The ambiguities in the Hindu nationalist discourse made Muslim and Dalit-Bahujan leadership sceptical of its ambitions. They viewed it as a prejudicial hegemony, under which it would be difficult for their people to survive. The portrayal of Hinduism as a spiritual way of life was articulated to indicate the liberal nature of Hindu civilisation but was secretly used as a flexible tool by nationalists to cover their sectarianism. In the essence of the nation as a divine spirit, they desired to universalise *Vedanta* and promote India as a *Vishwaguru*.

Nationalists eulogised the golden and glorious past of India and its downfall and present agony were blamed on the Mughals and the British. The Hindu nationalist discourse was directed towards the reclamation of the territory as a sovereign Hindu land, to revive its ancient soul and reinstate its lost glory. These kinds of glorious past narratives have often been present in ethno-cultural national movements across the world, and many times, the claims of glorious history were found devoid of historical truths. Political Hinduism has been assuming both the characters i.e. civic religion and religious nationalism, depending on the circumstances. While the former represented Hinduism as a public secular religion different from traditional dogmas, the latter advocated religion and nation as two sides of the same coin. Among the multiple narrations of India's past, those narrations that could foster social cohesion and cultivate national consciousness among Hindus were particularly selected for deliverance.

Religious-cultural idioms, allegories, and symbols, when popularised through nationalist discourse, contribute to the evolution and solidification of nationalist consciousness and ease the visualisation of sacred community. Idioms largely extracted from Hindu space were utilised to neutralise the discord that occurred in the nationalist movement due to the presence of conflicting interests between various caste groups, the advent of regional ethnic nationalism, the ideational hostilities between liberals and orthodox segments, and emerging Muslim nationalism. These idioms helped the uneducated masses to visualise and associate with the idea of a nation, which otherwise, in its absurd form, was highly vague to comprehend. In Hindu philosophy, the division between social and spiritual, divine and humane, physical and metaphysical, and individual and collective is ambiguous. Hence, the overindulgence and overlap of spiritualism, culture, and religion in politics and the national movement of India, is not a surprising revelation. These idioms helped to achieve mass mobilisation against the colonial regime, validate aggression and militancy, and vindicate national duty as a religious duty of the individual. Hindu nationalism had always been running parallel to and, at times, overlapped with Indian nationalism. Differentiating between them was a difficult task as certain aspects of Indian nationalism, which were observed as secular by liberals, were denounced as communal by Marxist historians. Some of these aspects include the image of Mother India, the singing of Vande Mataram on political platforms, the use of terminologies like Ram Rajya etc.

Gould highlights that there were certain crucial reasons for the deployment of Hindu idioms and expressions in the nationalist discourse. It helped to associate the nation with a specific religious community, postulate Hindu homogeneity, and add necessary drama to public mobilisation. The ancient greatness of India was highlighted with reference to epics and

stories of divine incarnation. It helped to upgrade religion in an organised form necessary to fulfil the needs of modern society. Temples and other religious places like Haridwar, bathing ghats, and festivals like Holi and Dussehra provided a platform to address and train volunteers for the national movement. The religious concepts of pollution and *adharma*, initially attached to untouchability and the unjust system, were used to declare Western civilisation and British rule as demonic and polluted. Its association with cow fats encouraged people to boycott British clothes more than the economic implications of the Swadeshi and boycott. Religious imageries contributed to implanting ideals of discipline, sacrifice, dedication, and collectivism among volunteers (Gould, 2005, p. 40). The use of terms like culture and spirituality instead of religion helped to transform the sacred into secular.

The elevation of the national movement to the status of sacred war drew holy men into the realm of nationalist politics. *Sanyasis* (Hindu ascetics) were enlisted by the nationalist leaders as intermediaries between the intelligentsia and the masses. Their traditional association with detachment, renunciation, and spirituality, made them effective in convincing the people to join the anti-colonial struggle. Their entry into politics symbolised the spiritualisation of politics and bridged the gap between religion and politics (Gould, 2005, pp. 47-48). Tilak's *Karma-Yoga* and Gandhi's *Ahimsa* were the merger of nationalism and spiritualism. The national leadership leveraged the platforms of *Magh Mela* and *Kumbh Mela* and collaborated with *sadhus* and *sanyasis* to address large congregations. Gatherers took pledges declaring their support and participation in the techniques of resistance (Gould, 2005, pp. 48-49). Gandhi and his notion of *Ram Rajya* became popular in the wake of spiritualised politics.

Parivrajak Mahamandal, an organisation of *sadhus*, associated itself with Congress during the days of civil disobedience. Its member Satyanand declared that the time has come for revolution. Swami Muktanand asserted that the fight against the evil government would be a success only when it would be a movement for the protection of Hinduism. Swami Parmanand urged people to abstain from intoxicants and boycott British goods. Swami Sharananand declared that temples and mosques would be polluted with the use of foreign clothes. In May 1930, pilgrims under the leadership of Swami Muktanand entered into a verbal agreement with the Congress. The Sadhus of Banaras, infuriated with the arrest of Madan Mohan Malviya, took a pledge to support Congress under the guidance of Padan Nath Shastri. Swami Chitanand asked people to follow Congress and Vedas. Baba Ram Chandra preached

politicised Ramayana. Swami Devanand compared Gandhi to Lord Ram (Gould, 2005, pp. 48-53). However, their participation in the national movement also widened the communal divide.

The start of the civil disobedience movement coincided with the Holi festival. Volunteers burned foreign clothes symbolising *Holi dahan* or the burning of Holi. Leaders like Nehru participated in the burning of foreign goods and an effigy of European men (Gould, 2005, p. 59). During the same phase, the cow was politicised and popularised as the insignia of sacrality, religion, nation, and vulnerability. While right-wing ideologues argue that cow worship has been an integral part of the Hindu religion since its inception, scholars claim that Hindus across all castes used to consume cow meat without any religious prohibition during ancient times. Only when vegetarianism began to be promoted by Jainism and Buddhism, and the worship of Krishna, the god associated with cows, became popular, did the Hindus shift towards vegetarianism. As a result, the cow became a sacred animal and cow slaughter came to be regarded as a major sin (Simoons & et al., 1981, pp. 122-123; Pal, 1996, pp. 53-54).

The initial decades of the nationalist movement were largely dominated by the Brahmin community. Under Brahminic influence, cow protection became a fundamental objective of the movement, and the cow emerged as the symbol of the Hindu nation. The 'body of the cow itself was invested with the divine and she herself became a proto-nation. This new space of the cow-nation embodied a Hindu cosmology, with the sacred inscribed onto her body' (Pinney, as cited, Gupta, 2001, p. 4295). By the end of the 19th century, multiple *Gaushalas* and *Gau Sabhas* emerged in Central and Northern India. Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati was a pioneer of cow protection activism. Gandhi extended his doctrine of non-violence to oppose cow slaughter. In 1882, Dayanand Saraswati established *Gorakhshini Sabha* (Cow Protection Society). In 1924, Gandhi established *Go Seva Sangh* (Cow Service Society) (Pal, 1996, p. 55). In North India, articles were published, and lectures were delivered with vehemence, intensifying support for cow protection. In plays, Muslims were shown killing a cow while Hindus stood watching helplessly. Muslims were projected as demonic forces of *Kaliyuga* (Tirmizi, 1979, p. 577). Kashee Nauth of Allahabad argued that the Hindu subjects would not exhibit loyalty towards Christian rulers unless the latter ceased cow slaughter (Patel, 2008, pp. 790-791). In independent India, cow protection received constitutional backing as Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 48) asserts the prohibition of slaughter of cows, calves, and other milch animals.

Muslims, as they consume cow meat, were perceived as a hurdle in the process of cultural restoration. The British were projected as cruel and indulgent on account of their material excessiveness and meat-centric food habits (Gould, 2005, p.77). The cow movement widened the resentment between Hindus and Muslims, contributing to communal clashes in various parts of India. To receive mass support for Swadeshi, the meta-narrative that British goods were polluted by the fats and blood of cows was built. It became the duty of Hindus to boycott British clothes to save the cows (Gould, 2005, p. 78). The cow was also hailed as the *Prakriti* (nature) and Mother India which nurtures men and makes them fit to serve the nation. The cow symbolises the Indian society, which welcomes all, but certain communities misuse her kindness. The cow symbolised the indigenous economy getting crushed under the exploitative economic policies of the British. Indeed, the cow was used to reinforce patriarchy. Cow ideologues argued that '…the cow was even better than the woman, as she could not think, speak, argue or write, and accepted her domestic status without any protest. The cow's dumbness and muteness were repeatedly emphasised' (Gupta, 2001, p. 4297).

The cow issue pushed untouchables, many of whom were consuming cow meat, into the dilemma of whether to support or not the nationalist imagination. The cow fats were considered a conspiracy of Christian missionaries to convert Hindus. The compulsive indulgence of Hindu religious elements to define the nation and assert the Hindu claim over the territory contributed to the ethnicization of Hindus. Correlating Hindu communalism and Hindu nationalism, Zavos (1999, p. 2270) argued that Hindu nationalism provides the ideological base for the development and extension of Hindu communalism. Hindu communalism is a discursive framework that positions the interests of the Hindu community precisely in opposition to those of other religious communities in India. While Hindu nationalism was formulated on the premises of religion, the religion itself lacked a coherent definition and parameters of identification. Even when icons like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, and Vivekananda tried to define Hinduism, '…their input was into a broader field of discussion defined by its ready acceptance of the validity of the idea of Hinduism' (Zavos, 1999, p. 59). This Hindu religious-cultural nationalism received concrete form and conducive platform when the English-educated middle-class intelligentsia chiefly belonging to the upper strata of society joined hands to establish the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 to institutionalise the nationalist discourse and settle the question of nation, nationals, and nationalism.

2.4 Indian National Congress: Synergy of Secular and Cultural Nationalism

After its formation, the Indian National Congress began facing internal disagreements regarding the representation of the Hindu majority, particularly in relation to the broader themes of nationhood and nationalism. While the secularists championed political nationalism and resisted the efforts to define the emerging nation through Hindu-centric inclinations, Hindu nationalists, to whom the political identity of the nation should replicate its social character, demanded that the nation's administration, law, and foreign policy should be shaped by majoritarian values. The Congress aimed to homogenise the nationalist discourse by merging diverse nationalist crusades under its institutional monopoly. Due to its syncretism, secular and sacred often overlapped in both its assertions and actions. Several of its members carried double identities, appearing secular and liberal inside Congress and cultural and conservative outside it. The most uncompromising segment of Hindu nationalists within Congress eventually materialised as Hindu Mahasabha, whose aim was to act as a pressure group within and without Congress and unite Hindu organisations across India.

Before the advent of Hindu Mahasabha, which evolved from Hindu Sabha, several Hindu organisations were simultaneously functioning on the sociopolitical front to protect the interests of the Hindus by rousing self-respect and cooperation among them. They aspired to promote the material, social, and intellectual welfare of Hindus (Zavos, 1999, p. 2273). The Hindu Mahasabha became aggressive in its assertions when Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was chosen as its President in 1938. He gave a call for militarising Hinduism against the Muslim threat when Congress was alleged of failing to protect Hindu interests against Muslim nationalism.

The origin of Congress lies in the transformations that occurred a few decades before its formation. The Arya Samaj established in 1875 replicated the religio-cultural reformism carried out in Bengal by Brahmo Samaj, established in 1828. Despite differences prevalent within their methods and thoughts, their core doctrines were common which aspired for neo-Hinduism. Madame Helene P. Blavatsky, ethnically Russian, after her unsuccessful marriage, went to America where, under the inspiration of occultism, she formed the Theosophical Society along with Henry Olcott in 1875. They came to India in 1879 and, with their warm relations with Arya Samaj, created the Indian branch of Theosophical Society. Indians, as well as some Britons, joined this society, the most important among them was A. O. Hume. In the post-mutiny period, the old provincial organisations such as the British Indian Association of

Bengal, the Madras Native Association, and the Bombay Association started to lose their prominence. Young members of these associations, who were also directly or indirectly associated with the Theosophical Society, formed new associations, namely the Indian Association of Calcutta, the Madras Mahajana Sabha, and the Bombay Presidency Association. They also had a desire to create some kind of all-India association to discuss socio-political matters, the most passionate one among them was Narendranath Sen, a member of the Indian Association of Calcutta. Their aspirations received a boost when A. O. Hume, the ex-member of the Theosophical Society, persuaded them to join his conference, which aimed to create the Indian National Union. The conference was held in December 1885 in Bombay. Those present there renamed the body as Indian National Congress (Bevir, 2003, pp. 100-111).

Although Congress acted as an umbrella organisation providing a common platform to diverse socio-political ideologies and engaged inclusive approach towards people of all castes, creeds, and religions, it was mainly dominated by a tiny minority of upper-caste English-educated middle-class men, who were the self-declared guardians of public opinion, and most of them were either Brahmins or had hereditary privileges associated with the estate (Aloysius, 2017, p. 120). The organisation was an attempt by Brahmins and privileged class elites to formally compete with the government within the 'due process of law' to reclaim complete or sufficient socio-political power. Their immediate objective was to develop mutual understanding and trust with the British to exercise state power and preserve their traditional hegemony. Secondly, the heavy-handed suppression of the mutiny of 1857 made them realise the futility of militancy and extremism. Hence, they shifted to the political sphere for bargaining.

Even though Congressmen agreed to enjoy power, position, and prestige by becoming 'advisors' to the English government, disagreement arose over their approach. Disagreements on the extent of power they should pursue, the strategies they should employ, and whether to remain confined to constitutional means or adopt extreme techniques divided the organisation into moderates and extremists. Similarly, the question of social reforms further widened the hostilities as some advocated to genuinely pursue them, while others wanted to acknowledge them superficially. The idea of a nation was highly ambiguous for the Indian continent. Hence, the Congress defined the nation by merging the layer of culture and polity with the territory. Hence, the stand of Congress on the nature of nationalism kept shifting between secular and cultural.

The intentions behind the creation of the Indian National Congress were always contested. R. P. Dutt claims that Marxist historians believed that Congress was purposely created by the British to prevent the reoccurrence of an episode similar to the uprising of 1857. D. Argov believed that Moderates aimed to protect and promote upper-caste interests by securing the perpetuity of British rule in India. They were Indian patriots loyal to England (Aloysius, 2017, p. 119). While the Congress used its logistics to liberalise and secularise the nationalist discourse, it received partial success as many Congress members also held membership in cultural, religious, and sectarian organisations like Cow Protection Society, Hindu Sabhas, Arya Samaj, etc. Both nationalists and moderates were equally involved in neutralising the egalitarian aspiration of the Congress through cultural organisations (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 123-124).

Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the core leaders of the Congress, was a critic of religious-cultural nationalism. He viewed it as a divisive ideology, unsuitable for Indian society, which exercises cross-culturalism. Not only does diversity exist between the communities, but it exists within the communities as well. Hence, Nehru aspired for multiculturalism, pluralism, and secularism as ideals of new India. Though Nehru opposed active cultural assertions, his work *The Discovery of India* passively associated the nation with Aryans and Hindus (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 169-170).

In Nehru's *Discovery*, India's history is portrayed as a linear narrative by thoughtfully skipping the anomalies and emphasising civilisational continuity and cultural resilience. The nation is conceptualised as a homogenous civilisation. The invasions of the past were cited as minor setbacks which did not affect larger socio-economic life of the people and especially did not affect the cultural continuum of the nation. Foreign forces which invaded and ruled India for centuries, could not alter the larger body of Indian (Hindu) culture and instead Indianized themselves in the process (Schulze, 2002, pp. 76-77). Nehru in *The Discovery of India* writes:

> There seemed to me something unique about the continuity of a cultural tradition through five thousand years of history, of invasion and upheaval, a tradition which was widespread among the masses and powerfully influenced them. Only China has had such a continuity of tradition and cultural life. And this panorama of the past gradually merged into the unhappy present, when India, for all her past greatness and stability, was a slave country, an appendage of Britain…(Nehru, 1994, p. 52).

Despite Nehru's image as a secular, liberal, and moderniser, his thoughts come close to cultural nationalists like Bankim, Savarkar, and Gandhi (Aloysius, 2017, p. 176). Although he advocated scientific temperament and rationalism, he rationalised the caste system as an ideal

social division of functional specialisation, which degraded over the period. Though caste '..is still a burden and a curse; but we can hardly judge it from subsequent standards or later developments' (Nehru, 1994, p. 85). He argued that during the times when the conquerors would enslave the defeated races, the caste system adhered to a peaceful solution (Nehru, 1994, p. 85).

2.5 Bharat Mata: The Personification of Territory

National consciousness and nationalist fervour are largely dependent on the gravity of visuals and symbols employed to help the people imagine a nation. One of the most successful artefacts of national imagination engaged in the days of national movement was the idea of Bharat Mata or Mother India. This form of visualisation and deification of the nation was not limited to India. The divine and motherly figure of Germania fostered German nationalism. Marianne, also known as the Goddess of freedom, was the personification of the French Republic in the days of the French Revolution. Russia was personified in the form of Mother Russia. Imageries are known to be convincing and deliver a message better than words and speeches. The maternal allegory helped to enhance fraternity and comradeship among otherwise disjoint social groups. The metaphysical idea of a mother nation is intrinsically attached to the topography of the national map. Hence, Ramaswamy (2008, p. 830) argues that the amalgamation of the map and mother nation results in the anthropomorphising of the map and the cartographisation of Mother India.

The envisioning of Mother India came into existence when Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's poem *Vande Mataram* was published in 1875 in a journal called *Bangadarshan*. However, the poem became popular and received prominence in nationalist thought when it was republished in his novel *Anandamath* in 1882 and sung by Rabindranath Tagore at the Calcutta session of Congress in 1896. The nationalist art picturised the colonised nation as a mother bound in chains. The despaired state of the mother was emphasised to galvanise frenzy among people and push them out of their slumber and nonchalant attitude to agitate for her liberation (Bose, 2017, pp. 7-8). The portrayal of the mother nation was ambiguous and confusing. While sometimes she was shown as the embodiment of the omnipotent Goddess *Kali*, divinity, and the spirit of the universe, she was also depicted as a vulnerable ordinary mother, pale and poor.

The painting of Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore in 1905 became mainstream and received pan-India significance during the partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement. While in Western India, the masculine rectitude of Shivaji was employed, in Bengal, the feminine depiction of the nation cultivated nationalist zeal (Bagchi, 1990, p. WS70). Abanindranath picturised her 'as a serene, saffron-clad ascetic woman, the Mother carried the boons of food, clothing, learning and spiritual salvation in her four hands' (Bose, 2017, p. 5). This gloomy rendering of the mother was replaced in the later years when she was portrayed as analogous to Hindu goddesses like Shakti, Durga, and Kali, transforming humane into divine, material into spiritual, physical into metaphysical, and natural into national. In this wake, Rabindranath Tagore penned down '*Amar sonar Bangal'* an ode to Mother Bengal. The portrayal of Bharat Mata was a gradual evolution of the idea of *Bangamata* or Mother Bengal (Bose, 2017, p. 5). A similar motherly depiction of the ethnic community could be detected in the Odiya patriotic poem '*Bande Utkal Janani'.*

The notion of Bharat Mata was further popularised by Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo. Aurobindo described her as a fierce Kali and persuaded volunteers to sacrifice their lives while engaging in terrorist methods to agitate against the colonial regime (Southard, 1980, p. 364). In his work, *Savitri*, Aurobindo looks at feminine power for the emancipation of humankind. He writes,

> Call her Shakti... call her Durga... call her Mahakali... Mahalakshmi... call her Mary, Mediatrix of all grace... call her the Divine Mother... she can conquer death... she will lead us back to the great personal trinity of unconditional love, from which we came... to the full, active loving perfection of being, consciousness and bliss, in the Self of the Divine (Netter, 2002, p. 53).

The imagery of the mother helped to personalise the otherwise absurd idea of the nation. Sister Nivedita saw in Abanindranath's painting a 'spirit of the motherland, giver of all food, yet eternally virgin, eternally raft from human sense in prayer and gift... is she not after all, our very own,… at once mother and daughter of the Indian land [?]' (Biswas, 2014, p. 796). Bipin Chandra Pal argued that India's history is the sacred saga of the divine mother. Our poetry, philosophies, arts, paintings, architecture, and music are the diverse expressions of mother's emotions (Bose, 2017, p.1). He glorified Mother India as Kali with a garland of human skulls draped around her neck and blood dripping from them. This romanticisation of violence was similar to Robespierre's 'virtue and terror' (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 9).

Religion-centric symbols, if used ambiguously yet stringently within the nationalist rhetoric, could successfully mobilise masses for a given cause. While Tilak acknowledged the

social dimensions of the Marathi region and employed the Ganesh festival to unite Marathi speakers for anti-colonial resistance, Bengali nationalists, acknowledging the centrality of *Shakti* worship to Bengal, defined the nation as the divine mother. Associating the nation with Kali, the goddess of destruction, added a leverage of glorifying and validating terror and violence. Members of the Anushilan Samiti, an association of underground militants and revolutionaries, used to conduct *shastra pooja* or weapon worship in front of the image of Kali. Nationalist art brought to life the metaphysical domain of the nation. It transformed the national terrain into a concrete object of worship, a deity with its civic religion, which is fundamentally modern, yet perceived to be primordial, and an entity which integrates the material and spiritual worlds and fuses past, present, and future.

Exposing the paradox present in the depiction of the mother nation, Ramaswamy (2008, p. 827) states that the mother is '…invincible but also vulnerable; as benevolent but also bloodthirsty; as comely maiden but also as ageless matron; and as guardian goddess of the nation but at the same time in need of her sons' care and protection'. The feminine personification of territory represents a masculine urge to dominate, domesticate, and protect her from external influence. The terminology motherland was not merely a metaphor like fatherland, but an inherent conviction among the nationalists that she is not an artificial individuality purposely constructed to rationalise the political demand, but a *Prakriti* or mother nature who gives birth and sustains people like a biological mother (Bose, 2017, p. 6).

There was a competing contrast in the appearance of Bharat Mata. The portrayal by Abanindranath Tagore represented her as an archetypical and hapless woman. However, the image, which became prevalent in the coming age, showed her as an omnipotent, calm, but reassuring Goddess. The image represented the notion of sovereignty by surpassing the image of Queen Victoria as the mother of the Indian subject. During the early years, there was great admiration among a few Indians towards the Queen's rule. Raja Sir Sourindro Mohun Tagore had even written a poem, '*Srimad Victoria Mahatmyam*', praising Queen Victoria and her rule (Ghosh, 2020, p. 302). The nationalist discourse was influenced by patriarchal ideals. Despite the astonishing glorification of the mother, her political and public role ends when she awakens her sons and hands down leadership to them. From fearsome Kali, she turns back into homemaker Durga (Sarkar, 1987, p. 2012).

While the picture of the mother stimulated nationalist fervour, the territorial map of the nation helped enhance the notion of 'private property' of the community. Sarala Devi, a niece

of Rabindranath Tagore, would make young Bengali revolutionaries take oath in front of the map of India that they would voluntarily sacrifice their lives battling for India's independence (McKean, 1996, cited in Ramaswamy, 2001, p. 101). The Ghadar Party, on the cover page of its nationalist poetry, featured the map of India inhabited by Mother India. With a sword in hand and facing westward, she stood erect with a lion in the background (Ramaswamy, 2001, p. 102). Other publications of the Ghadar Party portrayed Mother India wearing a sari, her flowing hair demarcating frontiers of the map, and her emergence from the globe depicting the universal significance of India (Shaw & Lloyd, 1985, as cited in Ramaswamy, 2001, p. 102).

In 1936, the Bharat Mata temple was constructed in Varanasi by a nationalist named Shiv Prasad Gupta. Instead of the idol, it has a huge map of India carved on the marble floor. The cartography was able to merge science with sentiments and modern with traditional (Gupta, 2001, pp. 4291-4292). Worship of Mother Earth or *Bhudevi* is not a new norm among Hindus. However, this temple shows a shift from the nation as a mother to an explicit reverence for the map and from the motherland to the homeland of Hindus. Swami Shraddhanand proposed the idea of building a Hindu Rashtra Mandir in every city. These temples would be dedicated to the service of three mother spirits: the *Gau-mata,* the *Saraswati-mata* and the *Bhumi-mata*. In front of the map constructed inside the temple, every child must bow and renew the pledge of commitment (Gupta, 2001, p. 4291).

In the days of Swadeshi, to persuade people to boycott English goods, a narrative was constructed that British clothes sold in India disrobe the mother, and hence Indians must protect the mother's dignity by boycotting English goods and buying indigenous (Ramaswamy, 2001, p. 107). A sketch published in 1909 in the Tamil weekly *Intiya,* showed Mother India holding in her arms four babies, two of whom were being breastfed with her visibly exposed breast. Another picture of Bharat Mata published in a Tamil school textbook in 1948 showed the mother covering the territory of East and West Pakistan as well as of Sri Lanka (Ramaswamy, 2001, pp. 103-104). The second picture indicates two things. Firstly, it stresses the capability of the nation to follow the policy of expansionism against its neighbours. Secondly, it delineated that the entire territory, i.e. India, East and West Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, is a single nation and rejects the reality of partition. Similarly, in some drawings, the existence of all other nations was almost erased by depicting India and Bharat Mata covering the significant surface of the earth; she is limited to India, yet grabs global space (Ramaswamy, 2008, p. 831).

Similarly, in one of the pictures glorifying martyrdom, Bhagat Singh was shown offering his severed head to Bharat Mata, and the blood dripping from his body was falling on the territory of India and Burma, and the delighted mother was blessing him for his sacrifice (Ramaswamy, 2008, p. 820). These kinds of paintings validated militant nationalism, masculinity, and warrior-like mentality among men. It represented tribalism in modern form, where a member must be willing to sacrifice life to protect the territory of the clan. The nationalist martyrdom treated students as flowers to be offered to Mother for the attainment of freedom (Gould, 2005, p.70).

Bipin Chandra Pal once claimed that for outsiders, India is an ordinary piece of earth, but for us, it is our mother. Aurobindo, regarding India, argued that its cities, hills, waters, and forests form her body, and her people are her nerves. They offer her nine-fold *bhakti* (Ramaswamy, 2008, p.826). Inside the family space, the women were expected to act in a manner that would suit the honour of Mother India. They were told not to be deluded by the splendour of the imported goods when the nation suffers in destitution (Bose, 2017, pp. 8-9). Although Bharat Mata was professed as a secular and public goddess, its association with Shaktism generated communal disharmony between Hindus and Muslims. Contrarily, Gandhi, during the inauguration of the Bharat Mata temple, argued that the temple would provide a common platform for worship to people of different castes, religions, and untouchables as well (Gupta, 2001, p. 4292).

As the nationalist discourse was derivative, there was also a foreign influence on Abanindranath Tagore's painting of Bharat Mata. The painting, which attempted to amalgamate divinity, womanhood, and national space, was influenced by the works and painting styles of two Japanese artists, namely Hishida Shunsō and Yokoyama Taikan (Inaga, 2009, p.151). The poem *Vande Mataram*, which praises the motherland and makes references to the Hindu Goddess Durga, had been a part of Congress since 1896, when it was sung for the first time during the Congress session. The Vande Mataram controversy of 1937 erupted when some Muslim members of Congress argued that its depiction of India as a Hindu Goddess conflicted with their Islamic monotheistic beliefs. At last, Maulana Azad, Nehru, Subhash C. Bose, and Acharya Narendra Deva, in consultation with Rabindranath Tagore, suggested that only the first two stanzas of the song, which have no connection with any religious elements, could be sung in future on the platform of Congress (Noorani, 1973, p.1039).

2.6 Early Nationalist Discourse: A Quandary of Change

In pre-colonial India, the state and society were not densely connected. Hence, political upheavals, like the fall of empires and external invasions, often had little impact on social life, which was structured within the caste system, social codes, and local economy. When the British East India Company gradually established its control over parts of India, and later when the British government undertook the total administration, it did not face any major resistance from people who were used to political transformations. The historical cycle of political metamorphosis had stopped Indians from developing national consciousness. The origin of anti-colonial national consciousness in India exists in the socioeconomic transformations that began to occur in India as part of the colonial project. These socioeconomic changes started to threaten the hegemony of indigenous elites. The attempts of the native hegemonic class to protect its interests and preserve hegemony from the ever-increasing monopoly of British colonialism fostered cohesion among them and subsequently contributed to the birth of national consciousness, when the war of hegemony was propagated as the war of culture, ethnicity, and nationalism, engaging masses in nation-making.

The earliest sociopolitical reformers in British India were English-educated middle-class men. In Bengal, they were called *Bhadralok* (gentlemen). They held a sympathetic view of the English administration and considered it a boon for India. In the ideas of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahadev G. Ranade, and Gopal K. Gokhale, one can detect admiration for British governance. Brown (1958, p. 200) argues that according to Lokmanya Tilak, the philosophy of renunciation propagated by the Bhakti movement, Buddhism, and Jainism was responsible for the lack of political activism among Indians. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee blamed *Sankhya* philosophy, which preaches otherworldliness and fatalism, for the colonisation of Indians. In the West, knowledge meant power, and in India, the goal of knowledge had been salvation (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 123). Additionally, the caste rules divided the people into invincible compartments. Bankim asserted that the lack of solidarity among Hindus and no single-minded dedication to the collective interests of the nation contributed to their colonisation (Chatterjee, 1986, p.123).

Before the advent of the Gandhian era, the national movement, which was largely centred around the elite class, was bifurcated into moderates vs. extremists and reformers vs. reactionaries. Under Gandhi, the movement replaced its earlier hostilities with Hindu nationalism vs. Muslim nationalism and *savarna* discourse vs. *avarna* aspirations. However,

these demarcations did not represent watertight compartments as the movement was partially hybrid. The earliest group of nationalists who laid the cornerstone of cultural nationalism in the post-Mutiny period were traditional social elites, chiefly belonging to the Brahmin class or the upper crust, and the majority of them either owned estates or held administrative positions under the British or pre-British rulers. Though they had internal ideational disagreements on various topics such as the scope of nationalism, objectives of resistance, and extent of social reforms, they were an exclusive group of educated middle-class men, whose aim was to preserve social hegemony with or without modernisation. They were Indian by blood, Western by intellect, and middle class by their position, hanging between coloniser and colonised (Torri, 1990, p. PE2; Aloysius, 2017, p. 127).

The early nationalists constituted three factions. The first group was of extremists, who were also largely social reactionaries, and included leaders like B. G. Tilak. The second group consisted of moderates, who were also social reformists, and asserted that social reforms precede political reforms. It included leaders like G. K. Gokhale and M. G. Ranade. The third group constituted leaders like Vivekananda and Dayanand Saraswati, who held that sociocultural change could be attained by the revival and reformation of the Hindu culture and opposed revolutionary transformation. For them, the solution to cultural problems exists within the framework of the same culture. All three groups, despite variance in their perception of culture and mechanisms of alteration, wanted to preserve the indigenous culture. There were ambiguities in their notion of social change; what they preached and what they practised would not align. While Tilak openly criticised untouchability, when the time came, he refused to sign a memorandum seeking to abolish untouchability (Pradhan & Bhagwat, 1958, as cited in Yadav, 2011, p. 44). Dayanand Saraswati's reformism, despite all its pretentious progressiveness, was directed towards nominal modification and establishment of Brahminism (Zavos, 1999, p. 65).

The Indian Renaissance of the 19th century was reformist as well as revivalist in nature. Despite the ideational differences, both moderates and extremists were revivalists to a varying degree, while the Dalit-Bahujan leadership was reformist in nature. The revivalists asserted that the key to India's progress and power exists in the revival of the traditional social system and the necessary adoption of Western ideas. Yet, their dream of reviving ancient institutions was highly impractical as, except for the institutions of panchayat and caste, much was lost or forgotten (Brown, 1953, p. 249). The middle-class intelligentsia was highly influenced by modern European thoughts and movements. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was inspired by Bentham's

ideas and the French Revolution (Mehta, 2019, p. 158). Vivekananda, Bankim, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo were inspired by the German thought of Schelling, Fichte, Kant, and Herder, and their emphasis on traditions, obligations, nation, and community or *Volk* (Mehta, 2019, pp. 159-160). Max Muller's works on Indian culture and Sanskrit texts developed a profound sense of admiration among Indians. Vivekananda went on to regard Max Muller as a reincarnation of Shankaracharya (Aloysius, 2017, p. 145). Bipin Chandra Pal's vision of Goddess Kali was inspired by Robespierre's Virtue and Terror (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 9). Aurobindo was influenced by Lamprecht (Mehta, 2019, p. 194). Tilak was influenced by the ideas of Mazzini, Burke, J. S. Mill, and Wilson (Varma, 1958, p. 15). The Indian national movement was inspired by revolutions such as French, American, English, Italian, German, Irish, Turkish, and Russian, as well as by ideologies such as Nazism and Fascism (Aloysius, 2017, p.141).

Orientalism had a strong influence on Indian nationalist discourse. While the English orientalists were critical of Indian society, beliefs, and practices, the German orientalists glorified the Hindu philosophy and Vedic texts. While English orientalism promoted inferiority, German orientalism promoted new vigour among Indians, which contributed to the foundation of Indian nationalism (Heehs, 2003, pp. 174-175). The Third World nationalist movements imbibed the civil and military educational systems of official nationalism exercised in Russia; their elections, party structures, and cultural celebrations were based on the popular nationalism of Europe; they imbibed the citizen-republican style developed by the Creole nationalism of America (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 21).

Despite their modern aspirations, nationalists maintained an aristocratic existence and had more similarities with the English ruler than the masses they were representing (McLane as cited in Aloysius, 2017, p.121). Despite being westernised in language and etiquette, they adhered to caste loyalties and orthodoxy (Seal, 1968, as cited in Aloysius, 2017, p. 120). Through their actions and reactions, they relegated the principle of social equality. They did not press for a universal franchise. They showed that class is the minimum qualification for participation in politics and bureaucracy. They tacitly signalled that others were not permitted in their exclusive club (Aloysius, 2017, p. 122). Nationalists had homogenised culture and power and opposed any change in its structure. They would justify it by asserting that a major change would diminish its originality.

The modern welfare state strives to eradicate social bondages and exploitations, paving the way for the creation of an egalitarian society. Caste, untouchability, and ascribed roles cannot survive in a progressive, centralised, and constitutional democracy. Hence, leaders like Gandhi opposed the idea of a centralised state and emphasised traditional village governance. The autonomous village system would have rather concretised caste codes.

The ideological rivalries within the Congress led to its split into moderates and extremists in 1907. While Tilak was chosen as the undisputed leader of the extremists, Gokhale was chosen by the moderates. Despite ideational dissimilarities, they were united as a class. While extremists were remembered as social reactionaries, the moderates were not complete social revolutionaries. They defended social reforms only to the extent they were necessary to modernise society to make it compatible with globalisation and industrialisation, prevent the uprising of the Dalit-Bahujan class, and establish titular democracy.

While moderates wanted to exercise power in cooperation with the British, the extremists wanted a complete and immediate transfer of power, and they were sceptical of the moderates' constitutional methods of agitation. Moderates were ambiguous in their assertions. For extremists, it was this or that, while for moderates, it was this as well as that. By calling themselves nationalists, moderates would demand national independence and, at the same time, present their loyalties towards the crown. Seth (1999, p.102) argues that more than towards Indians, Moderates' speeches were directed towards the English audience. More than firmly resisting foreign domination, they preferred to plead in front of the British government. The inferiority complex and subordinate mentality were so deeply rooted in them that they would often quote English and Anglo-Indian officials in their speeches to defend their arguments.

For these bilingual nationalists, the European principles of statecraft were comprehensible (only to them) and thus were working to translate the same into vernaculars, but their approach to translation was not upfront and was more metaphysical and ambiguous (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 122-123). Both moderates and extremists supported a laissez-faire economy. Though moderates were categorised as progressive and extremists were denoted as conservatives, the moderates were secretly conservative, and the extremists were partly liberal. Chatterjee (1986, pp. 127-128) writes that both conservatives and progressives were rationalists and, at the same time, sentimentalists and traditionalists. None of them was able to solve the perplexity of choosing between national and modern. Chatterjee (1986, p. 128) argues that while cultural nationalists, afraid of losing the indigenous or national, retained an

uncompromising position, which meant the complete transfer of power on an immediate basis, the liberal moderates retained a more modest position. They wanted the British rule to continue for a few more decades as tutelage till the coloniser sufficiently modernised the native leadership and institutions. In simple terms, while extremists saw change as a nightmare to hegemony, moderates saw change, to a limited extent, as mandatory to refurbish and reinstate hegemony in the new age.

Both reactionaries and reformers knew that social change was necessary for the success of the national movement; unless caste and superstitions are eradicated, it would be difficult to instil a nationalist temperament and foster social cohesion among the masses. Yet they feared that experiments directed towards social change, if not conducted within a limited scale, would dissolve the entire structure of culture and with it destroy Brahminical hegemony. Hence, despite all the talk on democracy, they demanded a share in power that would be sufficient for themselves and nothing for subalterns. Any louder demand for more power would have alerted the subalterns, whose numerical strength in politics was feared by nationalists (Aloysius, 2017, p. 128). The rationale behind their half-hearted support for social reforms was not to empower subalterns but to prevent any class revolution that would make elites lose their hegemony. The reluctance towards discussing social issues can be found in the speeches of Congress leaders. Dadabhai Naoroji once argued that only issues that concern the nation should be considered, and local and regional issues should not be discussed in the Congress (Aloysius, 2017, p. 130). Whether it was progressive Ram Mohan Roy or conservative Deb Kant, moderate Ranade or extremist Tilak, Naoraji who distinguished between traditional and civil religion or Vivekananda and Aurobindo who saw both identical, Savarkar who defined culture in geographical sense or Gandhi who saw it as spiritualism, whether it was Congress or Hindu Mahasabha, they all had one thing in common, and that was to preserve the culture and traditionality and prevent the transfer of power outside their group (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 148-149).

2.7 Indian Nationalism under Gandhi

Gandhi's thought played a fundamental role in homogenising the nationalist discourse by neutralising hostilities that existed between extremism and moderatism, westernisation and indigenisation, communalism and secularism, and conservatism and progressivism. As a moderate and reformer, he believed in the spiritualisation of politics, non-violent means of

resistance, social emancipation of the marginalised folks, eradication of untouchability, and advocated Sarvodaya and trusteeship. Like an extremist, he did not remain restricted only to constitutional methods and organised mass movements in the form of civil disobedience, non-cooperation, satyagraha, and demanded India's complete independence. Like liberals, he advocated freedom of religion, minimal state, secular polity, elimination of state coercion, self-governing society, and decentralisation of power. And like Hindu conservatives, he justified the *varna* system, advocated collectivism and duties over individualism and rights, denounced Western civilisation, managed the Go Seva Sangh, etc.

While nationalists blamed *vairagya*, renunciation, and pessimistic attitude of Indians for their colonisation, Gandhi associated imperialism with Western civilisation, capitalism, and industrialisation. While Bankim viewed lethargy and a lack of appetite for power and freedom as the reasons for India's colonisation, Gandhi alleged that it was the Indians' fondness for materialism that welcomed and sustained British dominance over India (Lal, 2009, p. 293). Hence, for Gandhi, true swaraj exists not in mere political independence but in the eradication of modern materialistic culture. Thus, like other nationalists, Gandhi bifurcated the nationalist discourse into the glorification of indigenous and traditional and the demonisation of Western and modern. Habib (1995, p. 7) argues that Gandhi held Indian civilisation and culture superior to the West, as unlike the latter, India neither has capitalism nor imperialism. Hence, India's material poverty was glorified as its superiority. When Gandhi emphasised the superiority of Indian culture within nationalist discourse, he fell in line with Tilak, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo. While other nationalist revivalists, though, silently aspired to imbibe Western knowledge where India was lacking, Gandhi outrightly rejected all that was Western. Patnaik (2018, pp. 30-31) asserted that Gandhi and Franz Fanon believed that true liberation exists in overcoming mental colonisation.

Despite his secular spiritualised politics, Gandhian emphasis often kept oscillating between secular and communal, and Hindu and Indian. Gandhian philosophy legitimised the social status quo, customary obligations, and conservatism. The cultural nationalism of Tilak, Bankim, and Bipin evolved as a spiritual war against modernity and materialism under Gandhi. Patnaik (2018, p. 30) asserts that *Charkha*, more than an economic tool, was a symbol of the native economy. It suggests overcoming the lust for foreign goods, deindustrialisation, reinventing local industries, and decolonising minds. Similarly, his promotion of khadi not only symbolised the economic self-reliance but also the boycott of British goods and culture. Sen argues that whether it was the charkha or khadi, Gandhi employed them to cultivate perpetual

social habits which eventually culminate into indestructible cultural elements and aspects of national identity. His salt march signified the power of collective action, civil disobedience, and familiarised natives with the technique of mass mobilisation (Sen, 2002). While Tilak blamed renunciatory mentality for the subjugation of Indians, Gandhi developed his image as an ascetic, upholder of renunciation, practised fasts and abstinences, and projected himself as a product of spirituality. He glorified protests and imprisonments as sacred sufferings, a sign of inner strength, and projected the national movement as a movement for *dharma.* His satyagrahis were spiritual or holy soldiers (Spear, 1969, pp. 293-294).

Gandhi's Charkha as a means to swaraj made no sense to Rabindranath Tagore. Gandhi advocated such campaigns to mobilise women, peasants, and lower caste masses to build popular support for the national movement. He kept them engrossed in superficial activities by propagating a grand narrative which convinced them that they were part of a larger social revolution which would change their circumstances, but, in reality, he was working to keep the status quo intact by keeping subalterns occupied with absurd activities (Aloysius, 2017, p. 211). Such practices not only provided modern apparatus to elites to conceal their personal agenda in the disguise of a democratic revolution but also transformed subalterns into emotionally infuriated foot soldiers who would fight for the nation and raise no dissent against the class and caste oppression (Aloysius, 2017, p. 222) Gandhi was also an economic reactionary. His emphasis on the revival of a village-centric pre-capitalist agrarian system was close to feudalism and varna obligations. He wanted farmers and peasants to abide by the conditions of their agreement with the landlord, irrespective of whether the accord was written or customary (Aloysius, 2017, p. 224). His pre-capitalist utopia had similarities with Russian *narodnichestvo* (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 98). Gandhi, under the dichotomy of evil modern and sacred medieval, tried to preserve the Brahminic status quo and legitimise social hierarchy.

Gandhi's ideal India represented enlightened anarchy, village republics, agrarian economy, simple living, spiritualised politics, duties over rights, cottage industries, collectivism, etc. His vision contrasted with that of Nehru's, who emphasised centralised government and a competent state. Mukherjee (2009, p.38) states that while Gandhi denounced modern civilisation and industrialisation, Nehru considered planning and rapid industrialisation as a remedy to overcome poverty and improve living standards. While Gandhi condemned Western scientism and cherished Indic spiritualism, Nehru believed in scientific rationalism. Gandhi upheld spiritual welfare; Nehru endorsed material welfare. While Nehru emphasised the separation of religion and politics, Gandhi insisted on the amalgamation of religion and

politics. While Gandhi emphasised duties, Nehru emphasised individual rights. Gandhi supported stateless village republics, but Nehru advocated a centralised democratic state.

Gandhi was an advocate of soft Hindu nationalism. Gandhi's accommodating attitude towards Muslims faced challenges from ultra-Hindu nationalists like Savarkar, Hedgewar, Golwalkar, and the Hindu Mahasabha. Bhosale (2009, p. 424) asserts that the ethnic nationalism advocated by Savarkar and Golwalkar led to the assassination of Gandhi. While Hindu nationalists blamed Gandhi for having a soft corner for Muslims, Muslim leadership saw Gandhi as an advocate of Hindu nationalism. Heredia (1999, p. 1500) argues that due to his balancing act, Gandhi was neither able to unite Hindus and Muslims, nor upper castes and untouchables. Gandhi was hostile to the demand for change in the existing power relations within the society. Ambedkar once stated 'I know Gandhi better than his disciples. They came to him as devotees and saw only the Mahatma. I was an opponent, and I saw the bare man in him. He showed me his fangs' (Singh, 2014, p. 413).

When Muslims and untouchables began to become socially empowered, they started to express political interests. While upper castes wanted a direct transfer of power from the British, the Muslims and Dalits wanted an equitable distribution of power (Aloysius, 2017, p. 185). Gandhi found these political assertions dangerous to the old order, and hence, he became critical of democracy and rights. He called liberal democracy a fish market and associated parliament with prostitution (Mehta, 2019, p. 219), though both these institutions are the foundation of an egalitarian society. He asserted that the liberal society isolates individuals and makes the community a nexus of loosely connected atoms. Gandhi did not realise that freely chosen isolation of individuals is far more satisfactory than coercively imposed social obligations and ascriptive roles.

There were paradoxes in Gandhi's ideas and actions. Aloysius (2017, p. 192) writes that Gandhi's insistence on simple living was inconsistent with the advantages he was receiving from the Birla group. He preached *Brahmacharya* while obsessively experimenting with sexual life. He asserted to free the human body from medical tyranny and yet was receiving care from allopathic physicians. He preached humility yet lived as if he had exclusive access to truth. He taught spiritual equality among all and yet defended the hierarchical *varnashrama* system.

Gandhi extended support to the Khilafat movement, started the non-cooperation movement, and initiated constructive programmes for the elimination of untouchability with the idea of bringing Muslims and the depressed classes into mainstream national politics and

preventing their emergence as new contenders for power. The Khilafat movement did more harm to Muslim activism than benefit. It replaced their crusade for political and economic empowerment by giving them a religious cause to fight for. In this way, Gandhi succeeded in receiving the support of Muslims for the activities of Congress, built trust among them towards Congress, hampered their brotherhood with untouchables by reminding them of their religious identity, and weakened the emerging Muslim nationalism (Aloysius, 2017, p. 197). Gandhi tried to solve the question of two nationalisms within the premises of Hindu-Muslim unity. But the more he insisted on their religious identities to forge spiritual unity, the more they became conscious of their communal identity, and the sectarian gulf kept widening (Aloysius, 2017, p. 208).

During the Gandhian decades, the national movements in Bengal and Maharashtra weakened, shifting the centre of power to the Hindi belt. His saintly appearance, advocacy of cow protection, and defence of one language for India, sidelined the Hindu Mahasabha. His truce with the Ali Brothers and the defence of the Khilafat temporarily bridged the widening gap between Congress and the Muslim elites, which weakened the Muslim League. His lacklustre efforts towards the removal of untouchability and the emancipation of Dalits weakened emerging political aspirations among them (Aloysius, 2017, p. 196).

Gandhi's approach to the untouchables was full of paradoxes. While religion was the structure under which social enslavement was carried out, he viewed untouchability as a religious issue to be resolved within the borders of religion (Aloysius, 2017, p. 197). His identification of untouchability with moral degradation jeopardised Dalits' efforts to find a solution to it in the political and legal domain. He began to investigate the question of untouchability to prevent the Dalits from emerging as political contenders separate from Hindus. While he wanted to eradicate the notion of impurity and untouchability, he wanted to retain the caste system. Many of his followers used to mix with untouchables in his presence and would have baths after returning home (Aloysius, 2017, p. 206).

Aloysius argues that when his financier and elite associates appeared displeased, Gandhi ceased the inclusion of *Harijans* in his ashram. His untouchability elimination programme did not include inter-dining. He asserted that by working for the liberation of Harijans, the savarnas would clear their path to salvation. More than their liberation, it was the spiritual liberation of savarnas that mattered the most. Initially, he opposed the temple entry of *Antyajas*. But when, under Ambedkar, they began to demand political rights, he started

supporting their temple entry. But when caste Hindus threatened to defeat Congress if they continued supporting the temple entry campaign, Gandhi gave up on temple entry to save the Congress. At one point, one of his close associates threatened to permanently close down the school in Bardoli taluka rather than allow an untouchable student to sit in the class. His Harijan Sevak Sangh was superficial and failed to address the actual problem (Aloysius, 2017, pp.209-210). After the devastating earthquake in Bihar in 1934, he argued that it was God's punishment for sinners for committing sins like untouchability. When questioned about the death of innocent folks in the calamity, he stated that he is not a God and his knowledge about it is limited. These ambiguities show Gandhi's inconsistency with rationalist argumentation (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 96).

Gandhi believed that destroying the *varnashrama* system would create social disorder. Kancha Illaiah asserted that Gandhi wanted to 'build a modern consent system for the continued maintenance of Brahminical hegemony…' (Biswas, 2018, p. 73). Dhananjay Keer asserts that Gandhi's belief was that caste is attached to birth and cannot be changed (Biswas, 2018, p. 73). Periyar, disappointed with Gandhi's and Congress's position on untouchability, started his radical programme for social reforms and political nationalism (Aloysius, 2017, p. 166). Gandhi's attempts towards the emancipation of untouchables were mainly directed to counter Ambedkar's movement, prevent Dalits' conversion to Christianity and Buddhism, weaken Dalit activism in politics as a separate group, and create a mirage of gradual mental reforms, but defend conservatism. The transition of bonded labour into mobile labour under capitalism made Gandhi criticise the liberal economy as well.

There was an enigma in Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence as he preached non-violence to the level of denying the right to self-defence to a victim. During the communal riots of 1946-47, Gandhi suggested that the women who might become victims of rape and violence must choose suicide over committing violence against the perpetrator to protect the honour of themselves and their families. He glorified this act as a sign of bravery and mental strength (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2010, pp.41-42). While Gandhi used the connotation of *Ram Rajya* to symbolise an ideal society, the Dalit-Dravidian leadership eulogised *Ravan Raj* or *Bali Raj,* which was more egalitarian than *varnashram* abiding Ram Rajya.

2.8 Nation of Caste

The caste, an institution of horizontal social divisions, was considered an obstacle in the path of facilitating homogeneity and cohesion essential to construct an organised nation-state; hence, it was criticised by Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, Vivekananda, Arya Samaj and others. Nonetheless, instead of its total eradication, the Brahminic nationalist discourse recommended its modernisation to make it compatible with liberal ideals of the new age. It was the calculated move to merge revivalism and reformism. While the question of colonial exploitation was discussed at length and protests were organised to redress the grievances, the question of caste-based social exploitation was tactfully sidelined. Comprehending the class aspirations of high caste nationalists, the early subaltern leaders like Jyotiba Phule looked at the British and Christian missionaries as the essential partners in the liberation and empowerment of subalterns, i.e. dalits, shudras, peasants, and women. Hence, Phule and alike supported the continuation of British rule to destroy the liabilities imposed on subalterns and provide them access to resources traditionally denied to them (Jha, 2011, p. 73; Guha, 2010, p. 35).

When the British colonised India, they entered into a tacit agreement with social elites. Since both were hegemonic entities concerned with the maximisation of interests, they decided to jointly exercise power. The political domain was retained by the British, with the educated middle class holding certain administrative positions. The social domain became an indisputable territory of Brahmins and the landed gentry. The economic domain was jointly administered, with the zamindars collecting the revenue from farmers, peasants, and tenants and paying a proportionate share to the British government.

> The pact between the native and foreign dominant groups… was indeed based on the premise that the status-quo of power, resource and leadership distribution within the colonized country was to be maintained and that rule itself was to be indirect, through the medium of local dominance (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 98-99).

Access of untouchables to education and employment, state-backed social reforms, religious conversions, the egalitarian administration, the rise of dalit-bahujan leadership, and their struggle for a share in power intimidated social elites, who saw the changes as a threat to their hegemony. Thus, the nationalist resistance to colonialism was rooted in the preservation of the status quo.

The Brahminic hegemony was legitimised by the religious scriptures. Hence, any form of meddling in them was intolerable to them. However, while reformers like Jyotiba Phule were ridiculing the sacred proclamations as Brahminic tool to uphold social power, Christian missionaries were interpreting Bhakti movement and teachings of Bhakti saints Tukaram and Chokhamela to enhance conversion to Christianity by drawing parallel between the ideas of Tukaram and Chokhamela with those of non-conformist Protestantism (Constable, 1997, p. 326). The earliest resistance to colonial rule emerged when the conservative segment started to oppose the social legislation of the government, as these legislations were endangering the old social order, economic relations, and creating a space for the egalitarian and liberal society. The radical reforms include the abolition of the Sati system in 1829, the removal of caste and religious disabilities under the Lex Loci Act of 1850, the measures to control the plague in 1897, and the Age of Consent Bill of 1902 (Aloysius, 2017, p. 108).

In this wake, to prevent the dismantling of the class hierarchy, the group emerged as cultural nationalists. Since the total revival of the old system was impossible, their objective had been to increase their share in bureaucracy and legislative structure and prevent the transfer of power to any other group than theirs (Aloysius, 2017, p. 121). While the elites were competing with the British to preserve caste and accommodate their hegemony within the colonial structure, the depressed classes were unanimously aspiring for the eradication of caste. While the former pressed for power, the latter pushed for empowerment. Subalterns' political nationalism and elites' cultural nationalism were antithetical to each other in their contents and aspirations. While the nationalist elites sought to construct India on an archaic model, for the Dalit-Bahujan leadership, the new India would represent a new chapter in the history of democracy. It must shun its ties with old protocols and embrace positivism. The clash was between change vs. status quo, rationalism vs. emotionalism, and Brahminism vs. anti-Brahminism. Guru (2011, p. 38) conceptualises the Dalit discourse as 'beyond' as it surpasses the derivative and *desi* (indigenous) discourses and formulates an alternate idea of India. Thus, Phule, by condemning *gulamgiri* (slavery), moves to *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* (religion based on universal truth) and Ambedkar's *Prabuddha Bharat* (enlightened India) is an alternative to *Bahishkrut Bharat* (India of the ostracised).

The nationalist movement was a passive revolution (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 49). The external colonisation was to be repealed to preserve the internal colonisation. When Christian missionaries began to question the rationale behind caste divisions and condemned ascriptive roles as anachronistic, various Dharma Sabhas came into existence to halt their efforts towards

social transformation. They opposed the teaching of the Bible in schools and public debates on religious matters. Under the patronage of missionaries, the subjugated castes had started to refuse to perform customary free labour and disobey caste restrictions (Aloysius, 2017, p.109). The missionaries' literature, journals, and magazines provided subalterns with space and logistics to engage in intellectual argumentation, public debates, reflect on social issues, and participate in social movements (Menon, 2010, p. 127). They gave voice to the voiceless. Between 1860 and 1880, several individuals from the depressed castes started converting to Christianity. The yearning for self-respect, dignity, and equality attracted them towards this faith (Hoole, 2004, p. 44). While the question of the privileged class was political within the nucleus of power, the question of the depressed class was psychological and material, i.e. self-respect and economic justice. Omvedt (1994, as cited in Nigam, 2000, p. 4264) argues that Dalits, as workers, were the lowest paid and offered mainly unskilled industrial jobs, and as peasants, they were landless and poor.

The elementary economic and educational upliftment received under missionaries and the British government encouraged the depressed class to look out for major transformation. Aloysius (2017, pp. 60-79) states that around 1800, untouchable Izhavas of Travancore rose against the Brahminical monopoly in matters of rituals. Untouchable Shanars of Madras challenged the practice of partial nakedness of their women imposed by upper castes. They demanded temple entry in Sivakasi and Kalugumalai and formed a non-Brahminic religion Ayya Vazhy. In Kerala, Narayan Guru played an important role in the upliftment of Izhavas. Ayyankali established schools for the Pulaya community and organised strikes against the ban on Pulayas from walking in public places and the compulsion to wear garlands of stones. Poykayil Johanan established a separate church for untouchable converts when they started to face discrimination in the existing church. Dravidar Kazhagam started preaching anti-Brahminism and Dravidianism. Iyothee Dass and his associates established the South Indian Buddhist Association. In the Andhra region, Yogi Pottuluri Veerabrahman and his disciple Siddappa opposed Brahminism by organising Madigas into Rajayogis. Periyar started a self-respect movement and promoted rationalist atheism. In Karnataka, Waddar and Holeya untouchables started to educate themselves and refused to perform traditional menial services. Srimati Yellamma and Sri Manjari Hanumanthappa developed caste associations and spread education among Waddars. Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule promoted girls' and Bahujan's education. Shahu Maharaj, the descendant of King Shivaji, defied the caste rules by hosting ceremonial dinners with lower castes. Shiva Ram Jamba Kamble demanded the

restoration of Mahars in the Army. He established the Indian National Anti-Revolutionary Party, demanding the total eradication of untouchability and the caste system. Ambedkar started the nationwide movement to promote the upliftment of the depressed classes. He advocated for the temple entry of untouchables and opposed *Watan* and *Maharki* practices. In Odisha, under the leadership of Bhima Boi, the Bauri community revived Alekha Dharma and stormed the gates of Jagannath temple on 1st March 1881, demanding temple entry. Muslims, Rajbansi, Kaibarta, Namashudra, Bhurmalis, and Mahisyas stood apart from the *Bhadralok* affairs. Under Guru Chand, the Chandals established the Matua religion. In Assam, Doms, Keots, Brittyal banias, and Sonar banias united under the All Assam Depressed People's Conference established by Sonadhar Das Senapathy and demanded a separate electorate. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Mahatos and Yadavas challenged the old hierarchy and struggled for their right to wear the sacred thread, promoted education among brethren, and denied obligatory labour. In Madhya Pradesh, the Shudra Noniyas claimed the status of high caste and imitated the wearing of the sacred thread. Chamars in Northern India joined the Satnami religion founded by Guru Ghasi Das. They defied the prohibition against the use of footwear, horses and palanquins. In many places, when untouchables attempted to imitate high castes' rituals, they were tortured and killed. The brandings of sacred thread on their chest and backs were made with hot iron. Around Agra, the Chamars, known as Jatavs, improved their economic condition by supplying shoes to the army. They established schools with the support of Christian missionaries. In the 1930s, they sided with Ambedkar against Gandhi. In Rajasthan, Ramdeo Panth and Naval Dharam of Dheds and Bhangis respectively, preached against *Varnashram Dharma*. Chamars in Punjab under Mangoo Ram established Adi Dharm. Besides, a huge number of Mangs, Mahars, Chuhras, Mazhahabis, Doms, Dhusiya Chamars, Hill tribes of Northeast India, Karta Bhojas, Mundas, Oraons, Santhals, Bhils, Mallas, Madigas, Sambavars, Shanars, Pariahs, Panchamas, and others embraced Christianity. While nationalists were focused on national self-determination, depressed classes were focused on individual self-determination. It was a movement for equal citizenship within the political community and equal social membership.

The primary emancipation of subalterns offered them the basic leisure to think about their collective political prospects under the colonial system. Their emergence as a distinct socio-political pressure group transformed the national struggle into a class struggle. The Gandhi-Ambedkar rivalry represented this class conflict. The colonial government's sympathetic treatment of the subalterns converted the nationalists from erstwhile collaborators

with the English government into confronters (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 106-107). The British government's effort to attain political hegemony by fusing state and society ended up providing equal membership to all in an erstwhile hierarchical society. It not only delegitimised caste superiority but also opened the gates of civil society to the subalterns. The long marginalised groups started demanding a new political economy which would guarantee them socio-political and economic equality, liberty, and justice.

The complex and multidimensional caste hierarchy emerged into a binary when Jyotiba Phule analysed it from a racial perspective. Phule divided the bahujan and upper castes into the binary of Dravidians and Aryans. He argued that the Brahminic scriptures deify Matsya, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, and other Brahmin invaders as the avatars of Vishnu, but were actually intruders who defeated aboriginal Dravidian kings like Shankhasur, Hiranyakashap, and Bali and imposed caste slavery (Jha, 2011, p. 79). While cultural nationalists considered the Vedas as insignia of superior culture, Phule saw the Vedas and Manusmriti as Brahminic texts purposely constructed to sanctify Brahmins and validate the subjugation of subalterns (Jha, 2011, p.78). The upper castes subjugated the bahujan masses by hegemonising education, rationalising obscure rituals, converting low castes into peasants and bonded labour, and later dominating bureaucracy. Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar viewed rationalism and education as tools for the social liberation of subalterns. Periyar's self-respect movement attempted total eradication of caste and untouchability by wholesome rejection of God, scriptures, and religion (Jha & Chouhan, 2011, p. 192). While the *savarna* nationalists defined the nation in terms of Brahminic Hinduism and advocated for its protection and preservation, Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar visualised Brahminic Hinduism as the root of all social oppression. While Phule viewed socio-religious liberation and education as a means to the upliftment of subalterns, his ideological successor Ambedkar went beyond to assert that only when the depressed communities would secure political power, they would be able to eradicate socially imposed disabilities (Sukumar, 2011, p. 237).

Unlike the Hindu-Muslim divide, where the colonial government was blamed for its 'divide and rule' policy, in the *savarna-avarna* polarisation, the state was a neutral force. In colonial India, to preserve the caste pyramid and consequent entitlements, the conception of homogenous Hindu culture was formulated to hide the functional inequalities under the metaphysical equality of Advaita. In the wake of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins cultural rivalry, when the subalterns started celebrating their non-Brahminic culture and traditions, the Hindu elites turned towards theatre art to promote their cause. The Marathi theatre

mainstreamed Hindu Brahminic ideology while marginalising all other genres, especially *tamasha, bhand* and *bahuroopi*, associated with Bahujan artists (Ajotikar, 2021, p. 109). In 1855, when Phule submitted the script of his first play, *Trutiya Ratna,* to the Dakshana Prize committee, the high castes and colonial officials blocked its success (Sathe, 2011 as cited in Ajotikar, 2021, p. 110). Marathi *nataks* of this era were themed on Hindu nationalism. In 1931, V. D. Savarkar wrote a play *Sanyasta Khadga* (Forsaken Sword), which questioned the idea of total non-violence popularised by Gandhi.

In the olden times, force and fear were used by upper castes to monopolise social and material resources. Scriptures were developed to rationalise inequalities and blame metaphysical concepts like *Karma* for the indignities faced by the suppressed class. The Brahminic monopoly on knowledge and education contributed to the ignorance and enslavement of subalterns. In the modern age, when the scriptures became incompetent to subjugate the bahujans, the elite class used the colonial system to restore the caste codes. Through the Gentoo Code of 1776, the Brahminical legal code was re-established in India. Its implementation in the age of positive law and legal equality represents how orthodoxy reinforces itself under modern conditions. The elite-subaltern dichotomy divided the public discourse into the binary of communal, traditional, and cultural against secular, liberal, and political. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had asked Muslims to stay away from Congress. Jinnah and Ambedkar, throughout the national struggle, had strained relations with Congress and Gandhi. Aloysius (2017, p. 129) asserts that when nationalists like Tilak opposed social reforms against political reforms, they fundamentally opposed the reforms, which had political implications and were directed towards maximising subalterns' share in power. Social questions were ignored on the grounds that they lacked consensus and would break the Congress fraternity.

While the 18th century represented the spread of liberalism in India, the late 19th century represented an upsurge of Hindu orthodoxy. Trapped between the influence of both, the Dalit leadership synthesised liberalism and revivalism by popularising neo-Buddhism as an alternative and challenge to Hindu conservatism. While Ambedkar revived the old religion, he provided it with a new liberal interpretation to suit modern necessities. While Dalits converted to Buddhism, they preferred to keep themselves embedded in indigenous philosophy. Ambedkar, being a hardcore critic of Hinduism for rationalising social inequality and consequent exploitation, pleaded with his brethren to convert to Buddhism as it was '…promoting the values of the *French Enlightenment - liberty, equality, and fraternity*' (Makwana & Elizabeth, 2022, p.36). For him, the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism

was as wide as the difference between oppression and justice (Mukerji, 2020, p. 481). While some untouchables preferred conversion to Christianity with the hope of gaining equal treatment, others were reluctant to move outside the Hindu fold, fearing loss of nationality. They desired to change religion and yet be included within the same society. This dichotomy was synthesised when a huge number of Mahars converted to Buddhism, seeking a new identity (Gokhale, 1993, as cited in Webster, 1996, p. 196). Despite the internal feud, nationalists were collectively indifferent to the demands of the depressed class and their leadership. The issues of caste and untouchability were often treated as insignificant and urged to settle outside the discourse of nationalist politics.

Jyotiba Phule admired the golden age of Bali Raja, a pre-Aryan king under whom society was egalitarian and righteous. On the other hand, Ram Rajya, which adhered to the caste codes, was an ideal society as per cultural nationalists. The Adi Dravida, Adi Hindu, Adi Dharmis, etc., were the nomenclatures propounded by outcasts to emphasise their aboriginality to the land. While Gandhi romanticised the notion of a village republic, a stateless democracy, Ambedkar saw the traditional village administration as an epitome of exploitation and discrimination. Hence, he defended the idea of a strong central government, opposite to Gandhi's Oceanic Circle, where the village is a self-governing republic.

While Gandhi emphasised individual duties as a means to collaborative living against the Western conceptions of rights, subalterns viewed social duties as customary obligations imposed through caste codes, and hence, for them, individual rights and personal liberties were the precursor to individual dignity and progress. While nationalists romanticised Hindu culture as the greatest virtue, Bahujans saw culture as the institutionalisation of power and exploitation. The demands of subalterns included democratisation of society, polity, and economy, freedom from hereditary obligations, freedom of profession, right to own land, access to housing, clothing, food, education, public roads, markets, offices, water bodies, religious places, literature, protection from the state, and right to political self-representation (Aloysius, 2017, p. 163). While the nationalists aspired for a Hindu state, subalterns aspired for an atheistic-secular welfare state. To Ambedkar, democracy thrives through comradeship.

To build popular support, the entry of the peasantry into the national struggle was necessary. The elitism of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie class had hampered the movement with unapproachability. It was necessary to associate the national struggle with class struggle. Chatterjee asserts that without establishing an intellectual-moral leadership over the

peasantry, the attempt to build a mass consensus for self-government would have been futile. The difficulty existed in the reconciliation of peasant consciousness within nationalist ideology. Either peasant consciousness had to be transformed, or to be appropriated. The former was difficult as it would have required a total transmutation of the agrarian economy, elimination of pre-capitalist forms of production, and the effective dissolution of the peasantry as a distinct form of labour. Hence, the nationalists preferred passive revolution wherein the revolt was directed only against foreign exploitation, keeping the internal hegemony intact. The peasant class would be comrades in this revolution but not a constituent part of the emerging nation (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 128). Despite this, the peasant class's entry into politics was unacceptable to the landlord class. The magazine *Bengalee* in 1887 argued, 'Who has ever asked that the peasantry should participate in the government of the country and direct the affairs of the empire?...'(Ghose, 1967, as quoted in Aloysius, 2017, p. 121). When the question of tenancy reforms became relevant, the government decided to initiate a few measures. The nationalists, some of whom were landlords, attempted to block the initiatives by arguing that the tenants needed no protection and demanded the extension of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 to the entire British India. A similar form of opposition was observed when the government attempted to pass labour welfare measures (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 122-123).

Though the national movement maintained an elitist character in the initial decades, under Gandhian leadership, the movement opened gateways for the participation of the peasantry, necessary for the success of passive resistance techniques like swadeshi, boycotts, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation. This change transformed the discourse into a populist movement with its roots reaching the remotest corner of the country, divergent from its original urban-centric character known as the *Bhadralok* movement. The success of the proletariat in the Bolshevik Revolution showed the world and Indian leaders the relevance of the working class in political movements. Habib (2017, p. 6) argues that by 1917-18, peasants and workers became part of the national movement when the Champaran satyagraha, Kheda satyagraha, and the textile workers' strike in Ahmadabad were organised. However, the slogan 'land to the tiller' during the Civil Disobedience movement pertinently made the national movement also a peasant movement. Chatterjee (1999, p. 159) argues that the colonial ruler, as well as Indian elites, saw peasants as a strategic asset to wield power and bargain against each other. While their nescience was helpful in manipulating them easily, it was dangerous as well, as it could have turned the whole nationalist politics into a chaos. Observing the success of the working

class in the Bolshevik revolution, Indian nationalists started organising mass demonstrations involving peasants and alike.

2.9 Islam, Muslims, and Nationalism

Since its advent, there has been consistent use of Hindu symbols and idioms in the nationalist discourse of India. The meaning and nature of the expressions and political language utilised to generate nationalistic zeal were contextual and subjective, due to which it was difficult to claim whether the specific rhetoric or political language was directed against the British or the Muslims and whether it was secular or sectarian. While the nationalist discourse repeatedly defined the nation in terms of Hindu culture to preserve caste hierarchy and ascriptive roles, the overindulgence of Hindu idioms contributed to the emergence of Muslim consciousness as a separate national community. The fear of ethnic persecution or being treated as second-class citizens made them sceptical of Hindu nationalism, Congress, and they hesitated to participate in its activism. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, displeased with the heavy reliance of Gandhian political discourse on Hindu idioms, alienated himself from the Congress leadership (Niaz, 2022, p. 920). Syed Ahmed Khan asked Muslims to stay away from Congress (Niaz, 2022, p. 917). There was a lack of participation of Muslims in the All-India session of Congress and the Civil Disobedience Movement. The anti-colonial resistance used to be coated with the nationalistic '…dimension mainly through the skilful articulation of specific grievances using a generalised language and imagery, incorporating selected ideological characteristics, some of which were derived from ideas about Hinduism' (Gould, 2005, p. 36).

The All-India Muslim League, which came into existence in 1906, used the communal tensions erupting from Hindu nationalism for the political mobilisation of Indian Muslims to put forth the demand for a separate Muslim state. The Congress contributed to its growth into a parallel national movement by showing unwillingness to negotiate a settlement with the League and Muslim leaders (Schlensog, 2007, p.162). While the League was parochial in its articulations and aspired for a separate nation for Muslims, the Ulema associated with the Deoband school advocated Hindu-Muslim unity, resistance to colonialism, and India as home to both Hindus and Muslims (Shakir, 1986, pp. 140-141). The Hindu nationalists were occupied in presenting India as a homogenous nation, and their articulations, despite being termed as secular and inclusive, presented a very narrow definition of India. This Hindu-centric

monocultural characterisation of India was stigmatising not only the British but also Muslims as foreigners (Gould, 2005, p.42).

The Hindu narrative of nationalism was considered offensive by Muslims, which resulted in sporadic communal riots. Ideas that were publicised to condemn British rule, such as cow slaughter and the use of cow fats in goods, ended up widening the chasm between Hindus and Muslims (Virmani, 1999, p. 174). To eliminate the separatist tendencies and integrate Muslims into the Congress, its members visited Masjids to address the crowd to join the satyagraha. Recruitment drives were organised during Muharram and Bakrid. They participated in Muharram by distributing sharbat but faced rejection from Muslims. In Aligarh city, local Muslim leaders objected to the use of the Congress flag in Muharram (Gould, 2005, p. 64).

When Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati declared its support for the national movement and its Shuddhi movement intended to produce homogeneity among natives, especially through reconversion, communal tensions escalated, which also led to the assassination of Swami Shraddhanand in 1926 by a Muslim (Web Desk, 2021). When Gandhi tried to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims by attempting to develop a hybrid culture, the more he insisted on their religious identities, the more they became conscious of their distinctiveness, and the gap continued to widen (Aloysius, 2017, p. 208). While the Congress tried to build communal solidarities between Hindus and Muslims, the Hindu Mahasabha performed as the antithesis to the Muslim League. Savarkar went on to state that India can never be a homogeneous nation as it consists of two antagonistic nations: Hindus and Muslims (Larson, 1995, cited in Baber, 2000, p. 68). Despite its gradual and salubrious assimilation within Indian society, the Islamic culture was argued as one brought to India by invaders, hence a symbol of grief and angst. Modern-day Indian Muslims were associated with invaders and held guilty for the atrocities committed by the Muslim rulers. Muslims were regarded as narcissists when they alienated themselves from Hindu nationalist discourse. Hindu volunteers were asked to neglect Muslims' behaviour as swaraj would be realised even without their support (Gould, 2005, p. 74).

Narratives were developed vilifying Islam and Muslims. Shivaji and the Sikh gurus were glorified for firmly facing the evil Mughals. Muslims became trespassers, and India became the homeland of Hindus alone. The cultural revolution demanded the eradication of Islamic elements to purify the territory. Bankim's works associated Islam with spiritual

poverty, fanaticism, and irrationality. The origin of the sati system was associated with hapless women's attempts to protect their honour from the ghastly acts of Muslims (Rag, 1995, pp. 89-90). While Aurangzeb was epitomised as the symbol of Islamic aggression, his brother Dara Shikoh, who had immense admiration for Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy, was strategically ignored (Sen, 2006, p. 61). The imagination of the nation as a divine mother pushed Muslims into the dilemma of choosing between religious doctrines and nationalist dogmas. Unlike the Muslims in other parts of India, Muslims in Bengal were not vulnerable and unfamiliar with the feminine personification of the nation. After the creation of Bangladesh, Tagore's poem *Amar Sonar Bangal,* which adores the mother nation, eventually became its national anthem. The poetic depiction of the nation as mother, which Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam developed, inspired Bengali nationalists during the Bangladesh liberation movement (Ahmed, 2014, p. 263).

The Muslim political consciousness from the beginning was divided into two streams. Being a marginalised section alongside the Hindu lower castes had indicated a possibility of developing a common political agenda. However, the fear of suppression under Hindu majoritarianism escalated the desire to develop a religious nationalism. Both these streams remained functional till the first quarter of the 20th century, after which the successful demand for the partition of India denoted the triumph of religious nationalism (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 94-95). Till 1900, the political consciousness of Muslims was limited to their aspirations for social emancipation through education and employment. The Aligarh movement of Syed Ahmed Khan pushed for social reforms and educational empowerment of Muslims along the lines of Phule. The uniformity of challenges and pursuits often encouraged Muslim leaders to sympathise and support the activism of the Hindu depressed class. In 1939, when Jinnah gave a call to observe the Day of Deliverance from Congress rule, it received an enthusiastic response from Ambedkar and Periyar (Aloysius, 2017, p. 96). Beyond the social factors, religion played a crucial role in the ethnicization of Muslims. Chengappa (2001, pp. 2158-2159) argues that Muslim revivalists were asserting that Muslims, by associating with Hindus, polluted themselves, which resulted in their decline. Their empowerment thus existed in distancing themselves from Hindus and strictly adhering to Islam in the Muslim homeland.

One of the reasons for the Muslim leadership to distance itself from Congress was its sectarianism underneath secularism. Many Congress members were also associated with religious and cultural organisations like the Cow Protection Society, Hindu Sabhas, and Arya Samaj (Aloysius, 2017, pp. 123-24). The initial political solidarity which was spurred between

Muslims and Hindu lower castes eventually weakened when the horizontal polarisation of subalternism was replaced by vertical religious polarisation. The dominant victories of Congress in the elections of 1937 made the League members conclude that in Hindu majority India, representative democracy would not work in the favour of Muslims. Hence, a separate state for Muslims was deemed necessary. Highlighting the Islamisation of nationalism, Shakir (1986, p. 145) argues that the religious polarisation masked the gap between lower-class and upper-class Muslims. The religious cause temporarily discarded economic predicaments. The historical, philosophical, and religious inconsistencies between Hindus and Muslims were repeatedly emphasised, and the demand shifted from a separate electorate to a sovereign homeland for Muslims. Pattanaik (1998, p. 1275) argues that the thought of a separate homeland for the Muslims received territorial shape under Mohammad Iqbal.

Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Iqbal, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were the founding fathers of Muslim nationalism in the Indian subcontinent. Syed Ahmed Khan, the pioneer of the Muslim Renaissance in India, worked extensively for the economic, educational, and religious liberation of Muslims. The sense of relative deprivation injected by him fostered an identity crisis and community consciousness among Muslims. Amidst these developments, Iqbal provided intellectual maturity to the Muslim nationalist aspirations. Jinnah used the pertinent ethnoreligious and political aspirations and carved out a territorial home for Muslims (Mujahid, 1999, p. 87). Surprisingly, all three in their initial political career advocated secular nationalism and Hindu-Muslim solidarity. Syed called Hindus and Muslims as two eyes of India. However, one can observe shades of distinct Muslim identity in his thoughts. He told the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta that it was the deep affection of the Muslim nation which encouraged him to work tirelessly for the educational, sociocultural, and political upliftment of the Muslims. To him, Islam was the central element of the Muslim nation (Mujahid, 1999, p. 89).

Iqbal's ideas provided an ideological foundation to Muslim nationalism and nurtured the idea of Pakistan. Hence, he is rightly regarded as the spiritual founder of Pakistan. In his letter to Jinnah, dated 21st June 1937, he vaguely suggested the division of India to create one or more sovereign Islamic states (Puri, 2003, p. 491). Iqbal was the Mazzini and Rousseau of Pakistan, while Jinnah was the Cavour and Garibaldi of Pakistan (Ahmad, 1981, p. 46). Talking on the civilizational lines, he advocated that the subcontinent constitutes two major communities, one having affinities with Eastern religions, while the other is the extension of Middle Eastern Islamic thought. He aspired that the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province,

Sind, and Baluchistan should be united as an autonomous region within the federal structure to form a centre of Muslim political power (Puri, 2003, p. 491). There was an inherent trichotomy in the nationalist articulations of Iqbal. While at times, he spoke about *ijtihad* and the Muslim nation, at other times, he spoke about Hindu-Muslim unity and India's composite culture, and still at other junctures, due to his socialist and universalist thoughts, he was regarded as Karl Marx of the East (Puri, 2003, p. 490). Iqbal asserted that God is power, and power is more divine than truth. He encouraged Muslims to aspire for power like their heavenly father. He held that the *Ummah* (Muslim Brotherhood) should not be subordinate to nationalism (Puri, 2003, p. 491).

On similar lines, Rehmat Ali coined the term Pakistan and expressed his idea of a separate Muslim state(s) in his declaration titled '*Now or Never'* in January 1933. He asked Muslims to shed Indianness and oppose the idea of the Indian federation. He coined the names such as Bang-e-Islamistan, Osmanistan, Siddiquastan, Faruquistan, Haideristan, Muinstan, and Moplastan to refer to possible Muslim states (Prakash, 2003, pp. 1060-1061). The idea of Pakistan was an expansion of the idea of the Indus Province of Muslims, emphasised by Agha Khan as early as 1918 (Prakash, 2003, p.1058). Like the Brahminic nationalism of Congress, the Two-Nation theory popularised by the Muslim leaders to demand a separate homeland for Muslims was elitist in nature and not supported by all Muslims. Lower-caste Muslims, the Maumin Conference, and the Muslim Ulama opposed the demand for a separate nation, as the demand had certain elitist interests and had nothing to do with Islam at large. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani wrote a book, *Muttahida Qawmiyat aur Islam,* to oppose the demand and toured India to convince Muslims not to get misled by Jinnah's ideas and to support composite nationalism (Engineer, 2004, p. 73).

Since the Congress relied heavily on Hindu idioms, Muslims labelled Congress as detrimental to the political aspirations of Indian Muslims. Their search for a political alternative ended with the creation of the Muslim League. When the Local Board Bill of 1883 was introduced, Syed Ahmad Khan had expressed the need for a separate electorate for Muslims, equal representation of Muslims and Hindus in the Northwest Provinces, and nomination of Muslims where their quota was not filled by election. This proposal provided an ideological base to the Shimla Deputation of 1906 that demanded greater representation of Muslims. It influenced the creation of the All-India Muslim League and sowed the seeds of Pakistan (Mujahid, 1999, p.94). Simultaneously, the xenophobia of the radical Hindu nationalists further escalated the Muslim separatism. M. S. Golwalkar, the second chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS), argued that Muslims must shed their foreign cultural identity to stay in India or they should be subordinate to Hindus and demand no entitlements, equal treatment, and equal rights (Casolari, 2000, p. 224). Savarkar denied considering Muslims and Christians as full citizens of India by virtue of their sacred land existing outside India, thus dividing their loyalty.

The Muslim League espoused that political alignments are fundamentally communal in nature. Indian Muslims are a distinct community and accordingly deserve separate status and representation (Shaikh, 1986, p. 547). While liberal democracy sees political groupings as a constitution of diverse social groups, the League rejected the belief that political assembly is fluid and transcends the borders of caste, class, religion, and race. For it, political groupings are the manifestations of static social groups (Shaikh, 1986, p. 543). Till 1940, it worked to carve out political space for Muslims within India, but when it realised that Congress was adamant and would not approve special concessions for Muslims, it started pressing for a separate state for Muslims (Qureshi, 1972-73, p. 558). Muslim nationalism '…is to be seen mainly in juxtaposition to the Hindu… demand for a united India rather in relation to, or as an extension of, Islam or the Muslim Middle East' (Qureshi, 1972-73, p. 558).

Indian Muslims are a socially diverse community. However, the Hindu nationalist aspirations forced the Muslims to develop homogeneity to collectively assert political demands. Urdu was popularised as the *Lingua Franca* of Indian Muslims. In the opposite direction, the Hindu religious nationalists needed an organisation which would be consistent in its agenda of Hindu nationalism and replace the timid Congress. These developments emerged as a reaction to centrism and secularism within Congress and its inability to promote majoritarian nationalism. Lal Chand, a prominent leader of the Sabha movement, proposed for

> the substitution of Hindu Sabhas for Congress Committees, of a Hindu press for the Congress press, organisation of a Hindu Defence Fund with regular offices and machinery for collecting information and seeking redress by self-help, self- ameliorations and petitions and memorials supplemented by agitation in the press and advocacy through trusted leaders in matters both special and common but dominated primarily by regard for Hindu interests (Zavos, 1999, p. 2274).

To counter the League, the Hindu radicals aspired to form a militant Hindu fraternity or *sangathan*. Jha (2007, pp. 1069-1070) states that the Hindu Mahasabha argued for the removal of the rigid caste system and untouchability and its replacement with a flexible and merit-based *chaturvarna* system to unite Hindus. Casolari (2000, p. 224) states that Savarkar and Mahasabha were inspired by militant ideologies of Fascism and Nazism coming to power in Italy and Germany respectively. They declared that the victory of Nazism represented the

failure of democracy and were astonished by the Nazi's stress on racial purity, Aryanism, centralisation, and glorification of Swastika and Vedik learnings. Savarkar represented a shift from political Hinduism to militant Hinduism. Prakash (2003, p.1058) states that when, on the cultural front, Hindu associations started *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* movements, in reaction, Muslim organisations started *Tabligh* and *Tanzim* movements.

While Neo-Buddhism was not as impactful as Neo-Hinduism in the domain of nationalism, Islamic revivalism in India was at par with Hindu revivalism despite Muslims forming a religious minority in India. Despite cultural differences, Muslims were politically close to Congress before the advent of the Muslim League and even participated in the activities of Hindu nationalists trying to secure a share of power for their community (Aloysius, 2017, p. 183). While Neo-Buddhism was a Dalit alternative to secure the dignity of life, Islamic revivalism had two primary objectives. Firstly, mainstreaming the distinct ethnocultural identity of Indian Muslims by passionately disseminating the Persian and Turkish influence and secondly, using the identity trajectory to demand a significant share in politics, legislature, bureaucracy, army, and educational institutions. When they failed to negotiate with the Congress, they put forth the demand for a separate nation. Mujahid (1999, p. 96) observes that revivalism among Muslims was their reaction to Hindu ethnocentrism, and it evolved in the form of the Aligarh educational movement, demand for a separate electorate, formation of the Muslim League, and demand for a separate nation.

While it is largely argued that the non-negotiable and exclusive attitude of Congress forced Muslims to demand the partition of India, Ambedkar, in his work '*Pakistan or the Partition of India'*, argued that it is the intolerant mentality of Muslims towards non-Muslims that encouraged them to demand a separate country for themselves. Muslims, who prefer religion over nation, cannot treat Hindus as their kith and kin (Mishra, 2025). While on the political front, Dalit leaders collaborated with Muslim leaders and offered moral support to their demands; in the cultural arena, they preferred to stay away from Islam. When the question of conversion arose, Ambedkar preferred Buddhism over Islam and Christianity.

2.10 The Hindi-Urdu Controversy

The national language plays an essential role in demarcating national identity, constructing a strong communal solidarity, and standardising the medium of communication. Language remained a matter of controversy while settling the question of the national language of India.

In the late 19th century, the question of the national language was more popular in the Northern belt, especially the United Provinces and existed as another dimension of Hindu-Muslim hostility. For both Hindus and Muslims, language was a core factor in segregating their communities and setting up their frontiers. Hindu nationalists declared Hindi as the mother of Hindus. Rigorously attempted to reduce the influence of Urdu from administration, literature, and academics, as Urdu, due to its script, was associated with the Persian language, the language of the Mughal court. In 1948, a Congress leader stated that the Muslims must not speak about the distinct Muslim culture, which is different from that of Hindus and foreign to India. Urdu represents a foreign culture, while Hindi would be a unifying factor (Khalidi, 1995, as cited in Ahmad, 2011, p.263).

Associations like Nagari Pracharini Sabha (1893) and Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (1910) strongly promoted Hindi in Nagari script as the national and administrative language. Hindi was advocated to build homogeneity and cohesion among Hindus and further the cause of cultural nationalism. Although the people of the modern-day Maharashtra, Bengal, Gujarat, Odisha and some other states do not treat Hindi as their mother tongue, they supported attempts to make Hindi a national language, as their state languages were treated as the sister languages of Hindi, all allegedly evolving from the Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism. In North and Central Indian regions, efforts were directed particularly towards the careful exclusion of Urdu. To counter the linguistic division, Gandhi asserted that Hindustani should be promoted as a national language. As a synthetic language, it consisted of words of Persian, Turkic, Arabic, and native languages and could be written in Nagari and Perso-Arabic scripts (Habib, 1995, p. 13). Raja Shivprasad, a supporter of the Nagari script, asserted that reading Persian script makes a person Persian, corrupt, and his nationality is lost (Gupta, 2001, p. 4294).

Hindi, in its present-day form, did not exist prior to 1800. Rather, Hindustani, written in Nagari and Persian scripts, from which Hindi and Urdu emerged, was the language of both Hindus and Muslims in the Northern regions of British India. Hindustani or *Hindavi* evolved from *Khari boli*, which evolved from *Saurseni Apabhramsha*, which has its roots in Sanskrit (Gusain, 2012, p. 45). In the debate between Braj Bhasha and Khari Boli dialects, Khari Boli eventually emerged as the language for nationalistic identification. Braj Bhasha lost the battle because it was viewed as erotic, sweet, melodious, and feminine, suitable for *shringarras*. While Khari was augmented as manly (Gupta, 2001, p. 4295).

Urdu came to be perceived as a foreign language, associated with the Muslim rule, and seen as a symbol of atrocities committed by them. This perception radicalised the Hindu nationalists to work on eliminating Urdu from the landscape of India. Attempts for the marginalisation of Urdu were also a part of the process, which sought to concentrate political, academic, and socio-economic powers in the hands of Hindu elites. To standardise Hindi, the Hindi associations attempted to Sanskritise Hindi and remove Persian and Urdu words from its vocabulary. Hindi was advocated as a chaste Hindu housewife in contrast to Urdu as a Muslim prostitute (King, 1994, as cited in Gupta, 2001, p. 4293). Around the 1830s, Persian was replaced by Urdu as the language of lower administration without much controversy, as their script was identical. Aside from exceptions, the Nagari script did not receive major official recognition in administration (King, 1977-1978, p. 112). Urdu had a precise script identical to Persian script and was much more standardised than Hindi. Since the 1860s, Hindi organisations had been urging the British government to replace Urdu with Hindi. Finally, the English government succumbed to public pressure:

> First, in Bihar Urdu was officially replaced by Hindi as the written medium of recording in law courts, then in 1872-3 it had to give place to Hindi in the subordinate offices in the Central Provinces and in the Darjeeling district of Bengal… In 1881 the Government of Bengal ordered the exclusive use of Hindi in Devanagari script in Bihar… Sir Anthony Macdonell, the governor of North-Western Province… enforced Hindi in the place of Urdu in the lower courts of that province… (Ahmad, 1964, p. 261).

Learning Urdu was denied to Hindu girls and women to protect their honour and chastity. While boys were allowed to choose between Hindi and Urdu, for girls, Hindi was the only option (Gupta, 2001, p. 4293).

Despite all attempts at de-nationalisation of Urdu, it is an Indian language as the vernacular was born in Deccan from the fusion of Turkish, Persian, and local vernaculars (Mujahid, 1999, p.90). After partition, when Urdu became the national language of Pakistan, it faced further marginalisation in its home country, India (Metcalf, 2006, as cited in Ahmad, 2011, p. 263). While Babur and Jahangir used Turkish and Persian in their writings, the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, preferred Urdu for writing (Mujahid, 1999, p. 91). Jinnah and Maulana Azad also used Urdu in their writings. When the demand for replacing Urdu with Hindi was raised in Northern India, the schism widened between both communities, giving severe form to ethnic chauvinism. Congress was accused of promoting Hindi over Urdu, since several times in the pandal of the Congress, after its formal session, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan used to be organised (Mujahid, 1999, p. 93). The disownment of Urdu and

imposition of Hindi and Hindu cultural ethos alienated the Muslims from the national movement, which prevented the amelioration of common nationality.

2.11 Conclusion

Indian nationalism, which emerged during the colonial period, was the admixture of contrasting ideologies. While it adhered to the caste system, which horizontally divided people into elites and non-elites, its regular utilisation of religious bigotry vertically polarised society into Hindus and Muslims as contenders for power, wherein the victory of one was feared as the subjugation of the other. The discourse was elitist in nature as it focused on preserving the power in the hands of traditional elites, with or without modernisation. Whether the political language and symbolism used were communal or secular was determined by whether the rhetoric was wild or tame. The discourse of social change followed an absurd trajectory. For some, it was anti-culture; for some, it was a nominal adventure, and still for others, it was a hope for a life of dignity. The nation was feminised, nationalism was masculinised, and the pride of the nation existed in the domestication of women.

Chapter- 3

Bal Gangadhar Tilak on Nation and Nationalism

3.1 Introduction

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, popularly known as *Lokmanya*, was one of the earliest proponents of Hindu cultural nationalism in British India. He played a fundamental role in constructing the idea of India as a nation-state by coalescing the European theory of nationalism and Indic philosophies. He transformed the emerging national consciousness from a social discourse into a political movement and shifted it from an intellectual symposium of minuscule middle-class elites into a pan-India populist movement having its peculiar ideology, methodology of confrontation, and philosophical quintessence. This chapter attempts to explore the various dimensions of Tilak's ethnocultural nationalism and his application of cultural material to construct the binary of indigenous and foreign to demarcate the nation. The chapter delves into Tilak's methods to mobilise natives towards the anti-colonial movement. This chapter locates Tilak's conception of culture, nation, and history within the spectrum of communalism, feudalism, casteism, conservatism, and patriarchy.

Tilak was born on 23rd July 1856 in the Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra. He belonged to the Marathi-speaking Chitpavan Brahmin community, a dominant Brahmin group in Maharashtra. His father, Gangadhar Ramchandra Tilak, was a Sanskrit teacher, headmaster of a primary school, and scholar, who later became Assistant Deputy Educational Inspector. His guidance helped young Tilak to understand and obtain the wisdom of religious texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Upanishads, and Vedas. Tilak's grandfather, Ramchandra, worked as a storekeeper for the Peshwas before the Revolt of 1857, and the family held the position of *Khot* of Chikhalgaon village (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 2). In 1871, at the age of fifteen, Tilak was married to Tapi. In 1876, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts from Deccan College in Pune and in 1879, he received his L.L.B degree from the University of Bombay. Determined to educationally empower Indians as a precondition for subsequent political empowerment, he and his colleagues, including Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, M. B. Namjoshi, V. S. Apte, and others, co-founded the New English School in 1880 in Pune. In 1884, they established the Deccan Education Society, under which

Fergusson College was inaugurated, whose foremost objective was to impart nationalist and cultural education to Indians.

In 1881, they started two newspapers, *Mahratta* and *Kesari,* in English and Marathi, respectively. The newspapers were printed at Arya Bhushan Press, owned by Chiplunkar. The educational institutions and the Press concentrated on developing the young generation of nationalists, who would act as a link between urban-centric ideologues and rural natives. On 16th July 1882, Tilak and Agarkar were sentenced to imprisonment for four months under the charges of defamation led against them by *Karbhari* (Chief Administrator) of Kolhapur Mahadev Barve, appointed by the British to take care of mentally imbalanced Shivaji-IV. Tilak and his colleagues had published news in *Kesari* and *Mahratta* accusing Barve of maltreatment of Shivaji-IV. This was the first attempt of Tilak to question the illegitimate interference of the British in the affairs of natives and princely states (Patil, 2006-2007, pp. 711-712).

From the beginning, certain fundamental differences existed between Tilak and other stalwarts of the Deccan Education Society. Tilak had differences with Gokhale and Agarkar over the question of social reformation, because of which, in 1888, Agarkar gave up his connection with *Kesari,* of which he was the editor. Later, Tilak, N. C. Kelkar, and H. N. Gokhale continued to manage *Kesari*. A few years later, Tilak became the proprietor and editor of *Kesari* and *Mahratta* (Pagdi, 2019, p. 7). Tilak joined the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1890. He was chosen as the Secretary of the Deccan Standing Committee of the Congress. He organised the initial five sessions of the Bombay Provincial Conference. Twice, he was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council. He had been the Municipal Councillor of Poona and later became a member of the Municipality in 1895. He was chosen by huge votes as one of the City Fathers of Poona (Pagdi, 2019, pp. 12-13).

During the outbreak of the Bubonic plague, the British government implemented harsh methods to curtail its spread and, in the process, triggered terror among people and offended their religious beliefs. The hate grew rampantly for Walter Rand, the special plague officer in Poona. On 22nd June 1897, he and another officer, Lt. Charles Ayerst, were shot. Ayerst died on the spot while Rand succumbed to injury on 3rd July 1897. A few days before this incident, Prof. C. G. Bhanu, Tilak's close friend, in his speech, referred to the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji and added that the killing of Afzal Khan was not a sin as it was done in the service of society without any personal aims. Tilak published these proceedings in *Kesari* on 15th June 1897, and Rand was shot on 22nd June. The police arrested Tilak on 27th June, alleging that his

article in *Kesari* provoked the murderers (Pagdi, 2019, pp. 17-18). The British held his articles responsible for the escalation of seditious activities and anti-British feelings. Wolpert (1977, as cited in Vartak, 1999, p.1132) argues that what provoked the Chaphekar brothers was Tilak's conception of the 'Hindu right to revolt', which was analogous to the Chinese conception of 'mandate from heaven'. Gupta (1997, pp. 3-4) asserts that the killing of Rand and Ayerst unleashed a reign of terror, which included militancy, bomb attacks, political murders, and the formation of secret societies which dominated the national scene from 1897 to 1910 in Bengal and Maharashtra. Tilak was held guilty under section 124-A and sentenced to 18 months of rigorous imprisonment. Meanwhile, the Chaphekar brothers were arrested for the murder of Rand and Ayerst. They denied any connection of Tilak to the killings. Considering his deteriorating health, eminent personalities like Dadabhai Naoroji, Max Muller, and William Hunter signed applications for his early release. After negotiation with Tilak by Officer Bruin, he was released on 7th September 1898 (Pagdi, 2019, pp. 21-23).

Tilak published 'The Arctic Home of the Vedas' in 1903. In this work, he concluded that the original homeland of the Aryans, ancestors of all civilised nations, was in the Arctic region. In 1905, Lord Curzon's decision to partition Bengal brought Tilak back into active political involvement. He joined the voices of protest and propounded the cohesive strategy of Swadeshi, Boycott, Passive resistance, and National education. Initially, the boycott was limited to British goods; later, it was extended to the administration too. In 1907, the 23rd National Congress met in Surat. The differences between Moderates and Nationalists, alias extremists, revolved over the question of whether to give emphasis to the 1906 Calcutta resolution of Boycott, Swadeshi, National education, and self-government. Moderates were not ready to officially accept the resistance techniques and wanted to delay the movement due to their inherent loyalty to the crown and convictions in the methods of constitutional agitations. There was also tension over who should be elected as President of Congress for that year (Pagdi, 2019, p. 33). The Congress eventually split into two opposite sections, i.e. Moderates and Extremists, with Gokhale and Tilak becoming the leaders of each faction correspondingly. Scholars and historians blame Tilak for the division of the Congress. However, Chatterji (1958, pp. 545-546) argues that while extremists were aggressive, the moderates' attitude was provocative, and they had deployed fully equipped Bohra Muslim goons around the Pandal. Even the leaflets asking the locals to teach a lesson to Tilak were widely distributed.

After the Surat split, there was a sudden increase in anti-colonial terrorist activities across India. Tilak's articles appreciated the cult of bombs in Bengal by associating it with

patriotism, and he wrote several fiery articles. On 24th June 1908, Tilak was arrested. A fresh warrant was issued by A. H. S. Aston, and on 29th June, Tilak was booked under sections 124A and 153A. Muhammad Ali Jinnah made an application for Tilak's bail but was rejected by Justice Davar (Pagdi, 2019, pp. 37-39). On 22nd July, the jury found Tilak guilty of sedition and similar charges, with a majority of seven to two. Tilak was sentenced to six years of imprisonment in Mandalay and a fine of one thousand rupees (Jog, 2015, pp. 109-110). Morley, then Secretary of State for India, was disappointed with the trial and conviction and found it politically incorrect. Tilak's verdict was later changed from hard labour to simple imprisonment (Pagdi, 2019, p.48). In Mandalay jail, Tilak completed his popular commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, known as *Gitarahasya*. On 8th June 1914, he was released from jail. In June 1915, he published *Gita Rahasya*.

In 1916, Tilak and Annie Besant launched the Home Rule movement. Meanwhile, Tilak came across the book titled *'Indian Unrest'* by Valentine Chirol. Tilak decided to file a defamation suit against Chirol for labelling him as the 'father of Indian unrest'. Tilak and Besant left for England on 14th July 1918. During his stay in Britain, he developed reliable ties with the Labour Party. He donated two thousand pounds to the party for its election propaganda and to help them turn their weekly *Herald* into a daily newspaper. The party leadership pledged to support Tilak's self-determination movement. They also provided their platform to him and his colleagues to address mass meetings from Glasgow and Edinburgh in the north to Plymouth and Southampton in the south. Tilak became the first Indian nationalist leader to detect the Labour Party as a crucial foreign ally in the independence movement (Tahmankar, 1956, pp. 281-283). In 1919, the British government of India passed the Rowlatt Act restricting civil liberties. On 1st May 1919, the Labour Party passed a resolution condemning the Rowlatt Act. On May 3rd, in a meeting organised by the Labour Party, Tilak made a speech asserting India's right to self-determination. He visited Cambridge on 5th June to address the Hindi Majlis, an association of Indian students. He also delivered a talk to Indian students in Oxford (Pagdi, 2019, p. 64). After World War I, a Peace Conference was organised in Paris. On 11th March 1919, Tilak sent a memorandum to George Clemenco, the President of the conference, requesting that India be represented at the peace conference. He also stated that India should be granted the right to self-determination and the right to form internal self-government. The British, however, did not allow it (Pagdi, 2019, pp. 65-66).

On 20th November 1919, he returned to India. Before his return to India, Gandhi had engaged in Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. On 30th January 1920, he visited

representatives of the Khilafat movement and declared his support. On 24th July 1920, he met Gandhi in Bombay and showed his moral support to the Non-cooperation Movement and wished him success. On 26th July 1920, he developed a mild fever, which the next day developed into pneumonia. On the 27th of July, he fell unconscious. On 1st August 1920, he breathed his last.

3.2 Theorising Tilak's Conception of Nation and Cultural Nationalism

Johann Gottfried von Herder, the father of cultural nationalism, argued that 'culture is the result not of individual endeavor but of the operation of folk-character. It is a nation as a whole which conceives and engenders culture. Culture is essentially national, and every nationality has a distinctive culture' (Hayes, 1927, p. 726). Tilak was greatly inspired by Herder's philosophy of cultural nationalism, which treats culture as the centre and soul of community and nation. Using the anatomy of culture to delineate the organic structure and nature of community, Tilak developed his philosophy of Hindu cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism was the most conventional form of nationalist uprising to emerge among Asian societies during the anti-colonial struggle to reclaim territory, self-rule, and self-respect. Cultural, ethnic, and religious nationalisms are distinct forms of communal identity formations, but are embedded in the same social circumstances and indigenous material. Tilak's imagination of India as a nation-state was a combination of Eastern emotionalism and Western rationalism. The Eastern tendencies for reviving virtue in social life by discarding external (European) influence and the Western approach of establishing a democratic polity suitable for modern conditions shaped his idea of the nation or *swaraj*.

Tilak's swaraj or self-rule was a dynamic nationalistic connotation which emphasised cosmetic modernisation and restoration of traditional order, keeping the power relations intact as before. Thus, while he supported the reformation of the political order and institutions, the aspired reforms were limited to strengthening the political hold of the hegemonic class in modern times without offering much to subalterns. Tilak's nationalistic delineation parallelly constructed the dichotomies between the *Savarnas* and the *Avarnas,* and Hindus and Muslims. Hindus and Muslims were not strictly polarised communities in pre-colonial India. Rather, the horizontally divided *Dharmic* society had cultures specifically limited to each *varna* compartment. The religious categorisations that the colonial government employed for operational efficiency alongside its legitimisation of Hindu law and Muslim law, and

rationalisation of majority-minority dichotomy, cultivated the notion of Hindus and Muslims as two inverse communities (Baber, 2000, p. 64). These administrative bifurcations generated sociopolitical competitiveness and hostilities among Hindus and Muslims. Tilak used these tensions to construct the framework of Hindu culture against Muslim culture and claimed national territory as Hindu land. Under V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar, Tilak's Hindu nationalism further radicalised and conflicted with secular-liberal nationalism of Congress (Rao, 2010, as cited in Oak, 2022, p. 20)

Tilak was aware that in India, where the national population is plural in terms of race, religion, customs, vernaculars, etc., the phantasmagoria of homogenous national culture, which presents itself as whole of diverse local material, yet hitherto distinct and superior to them all, would help the masses to visualise and embrace the 'imagined' nation. Cultural revivalism and the glorification of the pre-colonial past were the efficient tactics used by Tilak to implant the narrative that the contemporary order is compulsively detrimental, and hence, the restoration of the old order would solve most problems. Such narratives of collective emancipation procured populist support for Tilak's otherwise absurd notion of cultural nationalism. It was absurd because it was frequently oscillating between the physical and the metaphysical, the religious and the cultural, as well as between the secular and the sacred.

Apprehending the significance of cultural brotherhood in rationalising nationalist ideology and discourse, Tilak developed a metanarrative which was both historical and modern at the same time. He formulated sentiments of vulnerability among locals against British culture, as well as vindicated Islamic culture as a looming danger. Tilak knew that the sense of deprivation and retaliatory anxiety would mobilise people towards the national cause better than mere intellectual pomposities. Tilak's nationalisation of culture was fundamentally a discourse on ethnicization, attempting to develop ethnic homogeneity where it was primarily absent. It largely fits within Smith's theory of ethnic nationalism. Smith (1988, p. 50) argues that ethnicism is a collective effort to resist external threats to culture, eliminate internal corrosion of culture, and reintegrate the divided community by renewing and restoring traditions and practices.

During the last decades of the 19th century, Maharashtra was experiencing an upsurge of multiple social reform movements managed by subalterns like Jyotiba Phule and Brahmins like M. G. Ranade. Especially Phule was vehemently condemning the Hindu-Brahminic culture for the backwardness and exploitation imposed on lower castes. To thwart this attack on culture

and subsequent hegemony, Tilak sugar-coated and elevated Brahminic culture itself as the nation. He defended his opposition to social reforms by arguing that it would generate among people a sense of aversion towards indigeneity instead of developing national pride. To prove the historicity of culture, Tilak started the revivalist trend, and to provide it with a modern outlook for practical purposes and easy relatability, he gave it modern interpretations. To further concretise the case of Hindu culture as national culture, he associated it with the ancient-Aryan civilizational heritage and vilified Islamic culture.

He asserted that since the Vedic times, India had been a self-dependent nation, and Hindus were strongly united. However, in contemporary times, this unity has disappeared. Hence, it is the obligation of all Hindus to keep aside their internal differences and integrate to revive the ancient glory and emerge as a mighty Hindu nation (Habib, 2017, p. 48). When it comes to the unification of provinces to form a mighty Hindu India, Tilak can be seen as the Bismarck of India. Whether it was his *Gita Rahasya*, *Orion*, and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* or historical figures like King Shivaji, he interpreted them by using both liberal and conservative approaches. The Hindu nationalism and cultural revivalism of Indian nationalists were a product of a dialogical process:

> Hindu primordialist ideas developed in conjunction with evolutionary, 'physiological', and metaphysical notions of the nation, and that this was not an elementary or unmediated impact of European nationalist conceptions. It occurred through dialogical processes of negotiation and debate with such ideas. Aryanism- and its association with antiquity- was a major component of this configuration… (Bhatt, as cited in Krishan, 2011, p. 69).

Tilak was able to spawn a sense of brotherhood, nation-building, sovereignty, and self-determination among inhabitants, initially in Maharashtra and in post-1900 in other parts of India. His definition of national culture was both ambiguous and fluctuating, making it difficult for scholars to distinguish between communal and secular in his nationalist discourse. However, after his death in 1920, the militant Hindu nationalism of Savarkar defined the nation and culture strictly within the premises of the Hindu religion, fostering xenophobia towards Muslims.

Indian nationalists, both in ideas and strategies, were influenced by European nationalism. Although Tilak widely employed indigenous philosophical elements such as Advaita Vedanta, Karma-yoga, and Swaraj to construct his idea of nation and nationalism, he was significantly influenced by the nationalist thought prevalent in Ireland, Germany, and France. The ideology of ethnic nationalism, which initially formed during the German

Romantic movement, inspired many nations, including India (Dusche, 2010, p. 41). The doctrine of the people as the ultimate source of sovereignty was absorbed by Tilak from the creed of the French Revolution. He also shaped the spiritual aspects of his nationalism based on the thought of Herder, Fichte, and Renan (Inamdar, 1985, pp. 389-390). Inspired by Irish and other European nationalist trends, Tilak romanticised and mainstreamed the markers of national identity to visualise the idea of the nation to the ignorant masses. Instead of relying on the intellectual mode of disseminating nationalism, he moved to the vernacularisation of nationalism, wherein he exploited religious and cultural material to define nation and nationalism (Voigt, 1961, pp. 250-251).

His measures of devising nationalism were heavily influenced by conservatism, revivalism, and majoritarianism. Niemeijer (1972, p. 26) states that Tilak's utilisation of Hindu idioms, derogation of Mughals, and opposition to social reforms made him appear as an enemy of Muslims and lower castes simultaneously and in this way by adhering to communalism, he harmed the very discourse of nationalism which he wanted to popularise the most. Many Muslims left the Indian National Congress when Tilak and other extremists started dominating the Congress.

Nationalists like Tilak divided the discourse of politics and society within the framework of external and internal. While in the sphere of politics, which was external, they supported the modernisation of institutions, in the social sphere, which was internal, they resisted change in social order and objected to colonial interference (Chatterjee, 1999, pp. 50-51). Modernisation was projected as the degradation of Indian culture, and hence, Tilak used the two-sided tool of cultural revivalism and social reactionism to propagate cultural resistance to colonialism. Tilak's Hindu revivalism in social space and Hinduisation of nationalism in political space contributed to the burgeoning of the Two-Nation theory when Muslims started experiencing relative marginalisation. Panikkar (2003, p. 14) asserts that revivalism's static view of culture not only neglected the pertinent cultural-religious diversity of the Indian subcontinent but also disregarded the intrareligious plurality of Hinduism. The necessities of nationalism demanded cultural essentialism, which further communalised both the social and political spheres by delegitimising Muslim culture and blaming it for the decline of the Hindu civilisation. Chakrabarty & Pandey (2009, p. 20) assert that early nationalists, by outrightly employing Hindu idioms and carefully avoiding any reference to Muslims and Islam, were openly indicating the exclusivity and prejudices of the embryonic nation. Islamic revivalism,

Khilafat, and the following demand for Pakistan were Muslims' response to Hindu communal politics, which had its roots ingrained in Tilak's anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The 19th century was a period of major socio-political transitions in India, with the medieval era declining to create space for modernity. These transitions started to challenge the authenticity of traditional privileges, caste hegemony, prohibitions on lower castes in civic and political spaces, social slavery, and other social bondages. In this chaos, leaders like Tilak tried to merge secularism and communalism, native and national, Eastern spirit and Western reason, and democratic self-rule and aristocratic landlordism to halt social revolution and preserve feudalism in new terms. While initially his nationalism was limited to preserving cultural autonomy, when the economic transformations began to uproot landlordism and feudalism, swadeshi and boycott were articulated by Tilak to push nationalism also into the economic sphere. Aurobindo Ghosh, regarding the working of Lal-Bal-Pal, asserted that their contribution was 'the union of the new political spirit with the tradition and sentiment of the historic past and of both with the ineradicable religious temperament of the people…' (Prasad, 1964, p. 235).

The theoretical foundation of Tilak's conception of nation and nationalism exists in his advocacy of Swaraj. Influenced by the Western conception of political self-determination and the Vedantic conception of *Advaita* or non-dualism, Tilak articulated his philosophy of nationalism. Since the divine spirit rests in every human body, nobody is subordinate to be ruled by others and hence, freedom is the natural right of the individual and nation. Thus, Tilak elevated the demand for self-determination from the category of political right to natural right. Inamdar (1986, p. 106) states that Tilak's connotation of swaraj represents good governance, and the governed and governor should belong to the same country, culture, race, and religion. A government should be elected by and accountable to the *praja* or the subject. It also meant a welfare state and the right of the people to participate in political affairs. Khimta (2012, p. 650) observes that Tilak's asserts that the government should be morally obliged to the wishes of the people. If the government has the right to punish the offenders, people also have the moral right to punish or overthrow the government if it acts against the public good. Thus, Tilak legitimised the insurrection against colonial rule.

Swaraj is not only about a self-governing political community, but a moral responsibility of each individual to act as it does not affect others. Going beyond the nominal representative democracy of the West, Tilak advocated the idea of popular sovereignty.

Nationalist movements always require an icon of valour and vast greatness to fuse volunteers with patriotic fervour. He declared 17th-century Maratha king Shivaji as the first voice of resistance against the colonialism of the Mughals and attempted to revive the glory of the Marathas to establish *Hindu Pad Padshahi*.

While liberals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to radically reform the socio-religious aspects of Hindu community, inspired by the Western notion of individualism and monotheism, the opposite force of social conservatives, like the Brahmin class of Bengal and Maharashtra and spiritual figures like Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda, viewed socio-religious reformation as anglicization of Hindu community and a major threat to Hindu culture. To halt this reformative social engineering, they followed the path of cultural reawakening and developed neo-Hinduism by reinterpreting ancient sacred texts to suit modern conditions. It was not an end in itself, but presented Hinduism as a universal, inclusive, and most relevant faith. Vivekananda stated that:

> if there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi* (Sacred Land), to be the land to which souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way God-ward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality – that is India (Gokhale, 1964, p. 38).

Such narratives on Hinduism generated a sense of respect and pride among people falling under the fold of Hinduism towards their cultural heritage. The national awakening in India is generally observed within the dichotomy of renaissance or revival. But outside this limited understanding, a consciousness of being and belonging to a nation was evolving, which eventually intensified, changing the course of history (Voigt, 1961, p. 243). Under Tilak, this embryonic socio-cultural contextualisation of the nation became politically mature, and outside the nucleus of the intelligentsia, it reached to the common man. Dusche (2010, p. 38) states that Vivekananda initially asserted India's right to self-rule with Hinduism as its national religion. Afterwards, on Vivekananda's premises, the ethnocultural nationalists developed the idea of a national community within the context of Hinduism.

Though Tilak postulated the ideology of nationalism by merging Indic philosophy and Western theory, neither was he a political philosopher, nor did he develop a conception of an ideal society. He did not discuss the best state like Plato and Aristotle, or the perfect state like Hegel and Bosanquet (Varma, 1958, p. 15). He kept changing his perspective on what represented India as a nation and lacked consistency in his articulations. Till the late 1890s,

Tilak's effort was confined to the re-establishment of Brahminical hegemony and feudalism in Maharashtra. He rationalised caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and other social prejudices. He formed a strong force of orthodox elites who used journalism and public platforms to oppose the progressive endeavours of social reformers. During this era, his concept of nationalism was limited to a governance based on the Brahminical code. Liberal Brahmins and subaltern reformers confronted his propositions. Between the late 1890s and 1907, Tilak relinquished his campaign for the resurrection of Brahminical hegemony and social immobility and began to preach equality and fraternity among Hindus across castes. He started professing Hindus as a single political community against Muhammadans. From hierarchical Brahminism, he proceeded towards egalitarian Hindu nationalism. During this phase, he was accused of communalising Hindu-Muslim relations. After his release from Mandalay in 1914, Tilak largely liberated himself from all forms of prejudices and discriminatory attitudes and started advocating secular-democratic nationalism. Owen (1972, p. 573) asserts that Tilak sidelined Hindu self-assertions, and he, along with Besant, started raising the secular demand for Home Rule, anticipating the support of nationalist Muslims.

3.3 Caste Hegemony: Defence of Social Inequality

Antonio Gramsci, in the context of cultural hegemony, has argued that the ruling class uses culture as a medium to maintain their hegemony over the subaltern class. Rather than force, they rely on constructing perspectives and ideology which legitimise their authority and hegemony, naturalise their worldview, and secure subalterns' consent to their power. Tilak belonged to the dominant Chitpavan Brahmin caste, which exercised sociopolitical and economic power during the Peshwa rule in Maharashtra and neighbouring areas (Cashman, 1975, p. 18). Hence, one of his core desires was to restore Brahminic hegemony in Deccan India, for which he had to rationalise and idealise caste codes, social traditions, pre-modern structures, and corresponding cultural norms. In simple terms, preservation and continuation of Brahminism and halting all efforts towards social change had been part of Tilak's political career. He became an advocate of a democratic polity after 1905, prior to which he idealised a feudal state over a welfare state.

As discussed in the earlier chapter, activities of Christian missionaries, English education, and reformist legislations were disrupting caste-class domination, making a path for the liberation and emancipation of lower castes and untouchables, who were largely serving as

hereditary free or cheap labour to upper castes. With the gaining of social liberty, they started aspiring for a share in political power and occupational freedom, which was unacceptable to the orthodox section. Such social changes would have proved detrimental to their hereditary privileges and class hegemony.

With the British colonisation of the Maratha territories and the fall of the Peshwas in 1818, the Brahmin class lost its sociopolitical hegemony. Yet the community received a significant share in power as the colonial government decided to retain the Peshwa administrative system with minor changes and treated Chitpavan Brahmins as deputies in administration. Due to their educational status and ability to adapt to the colonial system, many were recruited into British service. However, the social reform movements which started surging during the second half of the 19th century to uplift the lower castes, untouchables, and peasants began to threaten the social and political power of Brahmins. Hence, Tilak became a hardcore opponent of these reforms.

Tilak had been a strong defender of caste practices and varna-based professions. Opposing the demands raised for freedom of occupation based on Western principles of individual will and choice, which simultaneously meant liberation from hereditary obligations and customary varna-based occupations, Tilak argued that such practices promote unhealthy competition wherein few prosper while others starve. Despite the fact that pre-modern India had a feudal system which had class divisions in the form of landlords and peasants, and the former was exploiting the latter, Tilak argued that in liberal society, due to competition, the wealth does not get equally distributed and as such some become rich while others live in destitution. He argued that it is only because of the varna system that we have been able to survive for thousands of years (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, pp. 107-108).

During the initial stage, Tilak's nationalism was concentrated towards the re-establishment of the social order based on caste codes. In fact, many times he had treated *varnashrama dharma* in the same strain as national culture. Although he acknowledged the unnatural and artificial divisions created by caste hierarchy, which also imposed misery on Dalits, he asserted that caste is a fact and part of Indian life. For him, the demand for the removal of caste should not be attached to the movement for swaraj. Tilak argued that a society aspiring for self-rule and freedom needs a structure, and caste is that enduring structure (Cashman, 1975, p. 53). Although he justified separate movements for social reforms and political demands, stating that social reforms would take decades to achieve and thus would

delay swaraj, in reality, he was reluctant to allow social issues to use political platforms, which naturally would have increased their chances of success. More (2018, p. 210) argues that in 1895, when the Congress session was held in Pune, Tilakites like Shridhar Vitthal Date threatened to burn the pandal of Congress if the Social Conference was allowed to hold its annual session.

Tilak was more infuriated with liberal Brahmins like Agarkar, Gokhale, and Ranade than with Bahujan reformers. He urged Brahmins to abandon the notion of equality between humans, end social reforms, and concentrate on pursuing their personal or caste interests (Rao, 2011, p. 16). He stated that meticulous adherence to the medieval Hindu order is the message of nationalism, and any other form of body politic and social reforms would be detrimental to the progress and culture of India. In his thoughts, caste was an uncompromisable factor. Cashman (1975, p. 52) states that during the 1880s, Tilak was the towering figure representing orthodoxy rooted in Hindu traditions and norms and was a contrast to other leaders like Agarkar. As a believer of racial-genetical supremacy, Tilak argued that Brahmin sub-castes, i.e. Deshastha, Kokanastha, and Karhade of Western India, should try inter-sub-caste marriages to produce genetically superior offspring (Oak, 2022, p. 59).

Initially, the Brahmins and the British had an implicit agreement over the sharing of power. While the political domain was retained by the British, the social sphere, which was traditionally dominated by the Brahmins, remained under them. The economic sphere was administered collectively. Brahmins, who were landlords and *savakar/sahukar* (moneylenders), helped in the collection of taxes. In the coming decades, the determination of the colonial government to accomplish congruence of socio-economic and political spheres for organised administration created a sense of loss of power among the Brahmins. Above this, the reformist activities of Christian missionaries and the British government had infuriated the orthodox Brahmins. Aloysius (2017, p. 107) states that due to ideological disagreement, the erstwhile collaborators of the colonial ruler began turning into major confronters. The language of the colonised began to emerge first from the Brahmin community. Deshpande & Despande (2011, pp. 1318-1319) argue that initially, the British used Brahminical codes and Sanskrit scriptures to manage domestic issues. However, this exploitative hegemonic order started facing opposition from subaltern intellectuals such as Jyotiba Phule and later Ambedkar. Aloysius (2017, p. 90) asserts that subaltern leaders started challenging caste and feudal domination. The bonded labourers and peasantry started to refuse to abide by old economic relations and social customs. These reformations faced attacks from the social elites, who,

under the banner of preservation of culture, religious revivalism, and swadeshi, aimed to reimpose orthodoxy. Tilak resisted social changes both as a Brahmin and a member of the erstwhile *Khot* family.

Tilak was a strong defender of the *Dharmashastras* (Hindu law codes). According to Tilak, Hindus must have personal law, and the state must implement but not amend it. Deśarivāja and sadācāra (customs and traditions of the land) are prior to deśācāra (state laws). Hence, in case of conflict between sadācāra and deśācāra, the former should precede (Oak, 2022, p. 83). Fearing the collapse of the traditional order in the wake of cumulative transitions, Tilak disdained the need for education for non-Brahmin children and resisted the admission of untouchable children from Mahar and Mang communities in schools (Rao, 2011, p. 15). When Ranade proposed the simplification of subjects such as Sanskrit and Mathematics for Matriculation and Bachelor of Arts (B.A) examinations to increase the participation of students from backward, lower caste, and non-literate backgrounds in higher education, Tilak vehemently opposed the reform. Perhaps, to restrict education only to the elite class, he requested Bombay University to upgrade the three-year degree courses into four-year degree courses and blamed reformers for overcrowding the classrooms (Rao, 2011, p. 16). By prohibiting access to education, Tilak was not only denying them an opportunity to move out of their generational ignorance but also a chance to break the shackles of social slavery. This stance of Tilak made him a contrast to reformers like Phule, Ranade, and Gokhale, who aspired for the universalisation of education.

When a bill was proposed by Congress leader Vitthalbhai Patel in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1918 to permit inter-caste marriage, Tilak projected his objection to the bill by writing to Dadasaheb Khaparde that the bill goes against the Dharmashastras. In *Kesari*, he asserted that as per the Dharmashastras, the progeny born out of inter-caste marriage could not inherit ancestral property or perform any sacred or religious rites (Oak, 2022, p. 60). Although in his speeches and writings he condemned the practice of untouchability and stated that if God justifies untouchability, he will not consider him a God, he refused to sign a memorandum to abolish untouchability and thus dismayed the organisers of a conference of the Depressed Classes (Pradhan and Bhagwat, 1958, cited in Yadav, 2011, p. 44). Tilak was not ready to accept the inconsistency of the caste system with the process of industrialisation and modernisation. He rationalised it by associating it with the European system of guilds and considered it necessary for the protection of the individual (Vartak, 1999, p. 1128). He adhered

to the varna system and wanted to explore the utility of the caste system to widen the base of industrialisation in India (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, pp.139-140).

3.4 Feudal Aspirations

Tilak was the defender of traditional feudal relations and opposed peasant-centric reforms. His ancestors were the *Khots* or landlords cum revenue collectors of Chikhalgaon village (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 2). Unlike *Ryotwari* system, in which the British had direct relations with the *ryots* or cultivators with regard to the revenue collection, under the *Khoti* system, the *Khots* had ownership of the land, peasants or cultivators were treated as tenants and had no direct ownership rights, and the *Khots* were revenue collectors from the peasants and acted as intermediary between the British and cultivator (Suradkar, 2013, p. 2). Due to the caste fraternity, during Peshwa rule, the majority of *Khots* belonged to the Chitpavan caste in the Konkan region, while cultivators were largely Shudras and Dalits (Suradkar, 2013, p. 5).

Chitpavans of Maharashtra, irrespective of whether they were moderates or extremists and liberal or conservatives, opposed change in the land relations. Suradkar argues that in the late 19th century, when the British attempted to abolish the exploitative *Khoti* system by passing the Bill, Tilak and Mandalik strongly opposed the effort, which led to the system's continued existence. Tilak argued that such efforts of the British government would bring miseries to the *Khots* and condemned the government for acting on behalf of the peasants. In 1901, when the government tried to bring legislation to restrict the transfer of cultivators' land to moneylenders, Tilak and moderate Gokhale opposed it. Tilak once argued that just as the government has no authority to unjustly seize the wealth of moneylenders and distribute it among the poor, similarly, it has no right to strip the *Khots* of their rightful income and distribute it among the peasants. It is a question of entitlement and not of humanity (Suradkar, 2013, pp. 13-14).

Peshwas abided by *Varnashram dharma* in administration and protected the class interests of Brahmins. Some Chitpavan Brahmins also worked as *Sahukars* in Maharashtra. Under the exploitative economic practices of moneylenders, many *Kunbis* had turned into hired labourers, surviving in poverty and debt, and working in their own fields as labourers. They had no surplus money, and a day without work was equivalent to starvation to them (Brahmanand, 1985, as cited in Rao, 2003, pp. 804-805). Many cultivators had lost their lands to *sahukars,* and the latter eventually became landlords.

With the fall of the Peshwas in 1818, Brahmins' hegemony began to face challenges from below; lower castes and peasants started to challenge casteism and feudalism. Famine conditions and excessive exploitation by moneylenders encouraged peasants to attack moneylenders. During the Deccan Riots of 1875-1878, the intensity of the rebellion of peasants and farmers against moneylenders increased (Rao, 2009, p. 56). To protect cultivators from financial fraudulence and exploitation, the Bombay government passed the Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act (DARA) in 1879. It abolished imprisonment for debt default, exempted the attachment of the tools and lands of cultivators in case of failed debt, and assured to protect peasants against loan fraud by creditors. It also set up the protocol that, while granting a loan, a valid bond between the peasant and the *sahukar* had to be formulated under the supervision of the village registrar. It provided a quasi-judicial mode of arbitration in case of default and dispute (Rao, 2009, p. 57).

Tilak, who came from the family of *Khot*, mamlatdar, and moneylenders, opposed the DARA considered by the government in the interests of the peasants. He blamed the British for disturbing the traditional master-servant relationship by giving the servant the right to appeal against the master. In his typical rhetoric of unnecessary interference of the British in the internal matters of Hindus, he blamed the government for destroying village harmony by meddling on behalf of cultivators. He equated DARA to legal plundering of the moneylenders by the government. He criticised the fixing of interest on the loan by the court, as per which the interest cannot exceed the original amount (Rao, 2009, p. 57). He condemned the class revolt of the peasants against moneylenders from a nationalist prism and asserted that caste alone is the basis of the Hindu nation. He considered moneylenders as gods to cultivators and, in protest against the DARA, asked them not to give money to peasants (Rao, 2011, p. 15).

In the southern Konkan, *Khots* would own the entire village land, making actual cultivators mere rightless tenants. These *Khots* used to acquire the largest share of the harvest, leaving little for cultivators. The Mamlatdars (revenue officers in charge of the tax collection) would always side with the exploitative *Khots*. When the British tried to curtail the powers of the Mamlatdars through the Mamlatdars Indemnity Bill, Tilak opposed the initiative (Rao, 2003, p. 805). When Ranade and William Wedderburn requested the government to establish Agricultural Banks to offer loans to peasants at a lower rate of interest compared to that of moneylenders, to guard the financial interests of the Brahmin moneylenders, Tilak rigorously opposed the proposal. Due to the strenuous resistance of orthodox nationalists like Tilak, who attempted to protect class interests in the name of *Rashtravad*, the Secretary of State denied

permission for the bank (Rao, 2011, p.15). Tilak also opposed the Conciliatory System introduced by the British to extend the courts to villages to settle matters between moneylenders and cultivators and protect the cultivators and their property from confiscation in case of failure to repay the amount (Rao, 2009, p.58).

While the British would blame moneylenders and their heavy interests for the destitution of peasants, the moneylenders would accuse the heavy taxes imposed by the government for the misery of peasants. Though Tilak was attempting to prevent the change in land relations, he was aware of the consequences of modernity. Tilak was inspired by the success of Charles Parnell and the Irish National Land League in mobilising peasants into the Irish self-determination movement by first employing extremist means against landlordism to protect the land rights of tenant farmers. At the same time, Tilak also realised that the downfall of feudalism in India would be an inevitable outcome of India's anti-colonial struggle when it would engage the peasant class (Brasted, 1980, p. 58).

During the later decades, Tilak changed his views on the demands and questions of the peasant class. While his feudalist conservatism led him to oppose pro-cultivator efforts such as the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879 and the Agricultural Banks, in the later decades, he modified his contentions and deliberated on socialist ideas. Naik (1999, p. 1023) credits Tilak for introducing the ideas of Karl Marx and his conception of class conflict to India. In *Kesari,* he would write articles supporting the cause of peasants, cultivators, and industrial labourers. In *Mahratta*, he used to republish socialist articles from English journals. Tahmankar mentions that in 1896, during famine conditions, Tilak established a relief organisation and requested grain merchants and wealthy bankers to help people in this time of starvation. His volunteers visited villages, offering food to hungry people. In *Kesari,* he asked the British government to save people suffering from famine and destitution and warned them of rebellion and lawlessness in case of their failure to satisfy the immediate needs of the people. He also requested the authorities to use the Special Famine Relief Fund, which had remained largely unused (Tahmankar, 1956, pp. 68-69). Tilak also asked the government to suspend the land revenue assessment due to crop failure. He asserted that those farmers who could not afford to pay should not pay the assessment (Pati, 2007, p. 59). He supported the railway strike in 1899, the postal peon strike for higher wages in 1906, and addressed several labour rallies between 1907 and 1908 (Pati, 2007, pp. 60-61).

3.5 Patriarchal Nationalism

Tilak was viewed by feminist historians as a patriarchal nationalist who disdained gender equality and the liberation of women. He implicitly projected the narrative that women are an inferior gender and should be refused participation in the public sphere, which is normally dominated by men. Oak asserts that when Ranade tried to cite ancient Sanskrit texts to normalise social reforms and argue that ancient scriptures champion gender equality and the freedom of women, Tilak cited some verses from Manusmriti to refute Ranade's opinion and argued that Manusmriti deny free will to women as they are susceptible to *vyabhicāra* (immoral acts or moral transgression). The text suggests that a woman should be obedient and submissive to her father, husband, and son during different stages of her life (Oak, 2022, pp. 83-84). The text absolutely denies freedom to women and expects the male members of the family to make decisions about their lives.

Tilak held a negative perspective on girls' education and opposed sending girls to school, especially English schools. He stated that learning English would make women and girls lose their nationality, destroy their traditional values and character, and eventually make them immoral. It would de-womanise them, deny them a happy worldly life, and destroy the family structure (Rao, 2011, p. 16). In 1884, he opposed Agarkar's efforts towards female education (Seal, 2007, p. 244). Tilak was the guardian of Hindu male pride and associated privileges (Wolpert, 1989, cited in Oak, 2022, p. 19). He argued that the curriculum of girls' education should be limited to vernacular, sanitation, and needlework and not learning of mathematics and sciences (Rao, 2011, p. 16). Despite congratulating Anandibai Joshi on completing a degree course in Western medicine in America, Tilak argued that such education is of no use to Indian women and would be harmful to our society if enforced (Oak, 2022, p. 55).

Tilak largely maintained a conservative stance when it came to the reforms in marriage and other women-related laws. The Age of Consent Bill became one of the biggest controversies in Tilak's life. Looking at the plight of child brides, both in cases of sexual abuse and child widowhood, B. M. Malabari suggested that the government amend the Hindu Marriage Act 1860 and increase the minimum age of consent for intercourse from ten to twelve years (Joshi, 1998, p. 616). Despite the opposition of Tilak and other conservatives, the bill was passed in May 1891. Tilak's opposition was based on the proclamations of the sacred texts. While the *shastras* were giving precedence to biological age, the Age of Consent law was

giving precedence to chronological age. According to Tilak, the state decree would hinder the Hindu customs since the *shastras* '…clearly stated that the garbhādhāna ritual [conception] had to be performed (by the husband) on the first day of the first menses experienced by his wife. This meant that a girl had to be married before she hit puberty' (Oak, 2022, p. 84).

To ridicule the reformers, Tilak and other opponents of the Age of Consent Bill proposed reforms such as girls and boys should not be married before the age of 16 and 20 respectively, men above 40 should not be allowed to marry except with widow, dowry should be prohibited, one-tenth of monthly earning of reformers should be surrendered to social cause, etc. to be brought into implementation and applicable to reformers alone (Keer, 1959, p. 58). While reformers upheld law to prevent husbands' sexual contact with underage brides, Tilak argued that domestic supervision of family elders would suffice to prevent early consummation (Kosambi, 1991, p. 1862).

Rakhmabai and Ramabai were the two women whose strong stances brought Tilak into the debate of social reforms. Rakhmabai was married to Dadaji Bhikhaji at the age of 11, however, she lived at her father's home till her late teens. At the age of 19, when she refused to join her husband, he filed a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights. She argued that it was a child marriage and had taken place without her consent, and hence, she should not be forced to stay with Dadaji. The court case went on from 1884 to 1888, after which it was resolved through an out-of-court settlement when Dadaji relinquished his claims on her (Kosambi, 1991, p. 1858). Tilak condemned Rakhmabai's refusal to honour her marriage. He argued that whether it is India or England, whether it is Hindu or Christian women, once the rites of marriage are performed, the wife has no right to break her bond with her husband, irrespective of whether the sexual contact has happened or not. He added that though she had not given consent to the marriage being a minor, it should not be treated as a major matter, as many couples who married at an early age lived happily together. He further stated that though the emancipation of Hindu women is necessary, such progress cannot happen in the hands of women like Rakhmabai, who is half-married and ignorant (Tilak, 2019, pp. 201-202).

Pandita Ramabai was an educated Chitpavan Brahmin widow who converted to Christianity in 1883. With the financial help of American Christian missionaries, she started Sharada Sadan, an institute devoted to women's education and the care of destitute widows in Bombay in 1889. Initially, she had started an institution called Arya Mahaila Ashram in Pune in 1882 but received no support from the leaders of Pune. When Tilak found reliable

information that, despite claiming to be a secular institution, the Sharada Sadan preach Christianity and certain Hindu girls and widows showed interest in conversion, Tilak lambasted her activities through *Kesari*, blaming Ramabai for converting Hindu women under the pretext of education (Tahmankar, 1956, pp. 43-45).

Though Tilak criticised Ramabai for running a proselytising institution in the name of girls' education, criticisms were levelled against him that he himself never contributed to promoting girls' and women's education by establishing any institution. In 1893, Tilak and other members of *Kesari* spoke about opening a school for Hindu girls, but the idea never materialised. Even when D. K. Karve promoted girls' education in accordance with Indian traditions, he did not receive Tilak's support (Keer, 1959, pp. 72-73).

3.6 Religionisation of Nationalism and Nationalisation of Religion: The Birth of Hindu Nationalism

Till 1890, Tilak's concentration and ideological efforts remained confined to suppressing the demands for social change and protecting traditional orthodoxy at all costs. He opposed social reforms despite recognising their rationale and utility. But when Muslims, as a homogenous group, began to emerge as a major contender for power and started demanding entitlements such as a separate electorate, Tilak commenced propagating Hindu unity by declaring Hindus of all castes and outcastes as a single Hindu nation against the Muslim nation. This proclamation was largely a façade, as it popularised pseudo-Hindu unity to achieve Hindu political unity for the political empowerment of Hindu elites. The contention was pseudo because, despite prioritisation of Hindu unity in the political-nationalist sphere, many nationalists were not ready to tolerate actual equality and fraternity within religion or support such reforms.

Tilak considered religious unity as a precondition for nationalism. He accused versatility and plurality of beliefs and worship as the main cause of the disunity among Hindus. He wanted all Hindu sects to unite to construct an organised religion (Tilak, 2018, pp. 36-37). From the intrareligious unity will emerge the national unity and political consensus. He synthesised religion and nation to assert that nationalism is the religion of people and religion is the national identity of people. He shunned sympathising with the caste codes and started to profess the idea of a pan-India mighty Hindu nation. From the horizontal divisions of caste hierarchy, he moved towards vertical polarisation of religions. His characterisation of the

nation was confined to Hindus, Hinduism, Hindu culture, and the Hindi language. This transformation contributed to the ethnicisation of Hindus, communalisation of politics, and alienation of Muslims.

Tilak formed two conceptions with the merger of religion and nationalism. By nationalising the Hindu religion, he presented religion and nation as two sides of the same coin and popularised the majoritarian definition of nationalism, which engaged more masses in the otherwise isolated intellectual methodology of nation-making. This very mechanism presented the demand for the formation of a theological state and emphasised that the state should use its institutions to protect the religion. Tilak believed that the sovereign cannot pass decrees which contradict the codes of the *Dharmashastras*, and he is bound to respect conventional codes and local customs (Oak, 2022, p. 83). By religionising the nation, Tilak created a cult of nationalism, which surpasses the narrow borders of traditional religions and highlights itself as a territorial public-civic religion. Tilak appears to have been influenced by J. J. Rousseau's concept of civic religion:

> He [Rousseau] envisioned a religion of sociability, a religion of the citizen, whose contents were not the dogmas of traditional religions, but rather the sentiments of sociability that all citizens should have. The dogmas of this religion were to be few and simple, and among them would be the existence of divinity, life after death, rapture for the just, damnation for evil-doers, and the sanctity of the social contract (Santiago, 2009, p. 395).

The trajectory of Hindu nationalism brought Bengali and Marathi nationalists together as cultural and methodological extremists within the Congress, who devised a successful Swadeshi and boycott campaign later. Despite their nationalist temperament, aggressive fervour, and advocacy of Hindu nationalism, there were ideational differences between them. Varma argues that Aurobindo philosophised nationalism as a divine play and considered India as the incarnation of the goddess *Kali*. His philosophy passionately indulges in metaphysical abstractions like Integral Yoga. Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal had their philosophy immersed in emotionalism and masculine zeal. Tilak's pragmatic outlook prevented his nationalism from getting subjugated by vague mysticism, and he did not strongly advocate the idea of a nation as a God or Goddess. He popularised Shivaji, Nana Fadnavis, and the Ganesh festival to mobilise volunteers. Bengali nationalist revolutionism was deeply embedded in histrionics and imagination. But in Maharashtra, reason and realism dominated the nationalist discourse (Varma, 1958, p. 20).

Tilak demeaned the entry of English and Mughal culture into India and blamed it for India's downfall. For the revival of India, Hinduism was the solution for Tilak. He asserted that by observing our past, we could understand that during Vedic times, India was a self-contained community and a successful nation. That greatness and unity have disappeared over centuries, and hence, we need to revive that union, and Hinduism will provide for moral and social bonding (Tilak, 2018, p. 36). While culture, in the domain of nationalist politics, is fundamentally an absurd concept to ascribe or describe to the public, religion is more substantial, imaginable, associable, and applicable. Acknowledging the communication barriers existing among Hindus in the absence of a *lingua franca,* to formulate majoritarianism for nationalist crusades, Tilak employed religion. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism was an assemblage of diverse *dharmic* sects, lacking organised structure and subtle ideational homogeneousness. Therefore, Tilak decided to redefine Hinduism to construct political Hinduism. His conception of political Hinduism gave birth to two contrasting interpretations of Hinduism after his death. While Gandhi developed the philosophy of spiritual Hinduism on the foundation of Tilak's ideas and tried to secularise its nature within nationalist politics to attain Hindu-Muslim solidarity, V. D. Savarkar developed *Hindutva* or militant Hinduism employing Tilak's speculations, which escalated communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Bhosale (2009, p. 426) argues that Tilak and Gandhi advocated spiritual nationalism, and for both, Hinduism had nothing to do with Hindutva. Kumar (2006, p. 33) argues that Savarkar was inspired by Tilak's advocacy of cultural nationalism against territorial or political nationalism. While Tilak was not directly associated with Hindutva politics of the 1930s and onwards, the erstwhile radical followers of Tilak, who were disappointed with Gandhi's appeasement of Muslims, contributed to the emergence of the Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Sangh's sixth chief, Mohan Bhagwat, stated that Tilak was among the few personalities who inspired Hedgewar to establish RSS in 1925 (Patil, 2023).

Lokmanya looked at the Bhagavad Gita to instil political activism among natives and overcome their attitude of indifference. Orientalist scholars had described Hinduism as a philosophy of life and overemphasised its reductionist and renunciatory philosophies. Harvey argues that Tilak blamed the philosophy of *vairagya* or renunciation and the teachings of the Bhakti saints for the colonisation of Hindus initially under Muslims and later under the British. He accused pacifist faiths like Jainism and Buddhism of over-preaching renunciatory philosophy to Indians. He denounced the teachings of Adi Shankaracharya for treating the phenomenal world as *maya* (illusion) and arguing that *Moksha* (salvation) could be attained

only by cutting ties with the world of action and renouncing it totally. For Tilak, such philosophical argumentation was responsible for the escapist mentality among Hindus. Additionally, several Bhakti saints had argued that *Bhakti yoga* (devotion) is the core message of the Bhagavad Gita. To counter inactivism and detachment and instil courage and activism among Hindus, Tilak wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita titled Gita Rahasya, wherein he argued that *Karma yoga* (philosophy of activism) is the essential message of the Gita (Harvey, 1986, pp. 322-323). Thus, he utilised the religious teachings for the purpose of nationalism and to encourage *Loksamgraha*, which means performing actions for the collective well-being of society with a detached mindset.

Nationalism is a populist movement fuelled by collective hysteria and group ambition to restore the extinct or about-to-extinct nation, and the emotional zeal of such a populist movement easily surpasses reason and intellect when the masses get revolutionised when provided with sacrosanct reason to sacrifice both their life and resources if and when necessary for the cause which is national. Bhagavad Gita became the text used by Tilak to revolutionise the masses to act and rationalise their aggression. While publishing the speech of S. G. Jinsiwale in *Kesari* of 15th June 1897, Tilak argued that when Shivaji killed Afzal Khan, he did not commit a sin. Gita states that killing is just and the action is free from any blame if the person commits it for the public good and community welfare instead of self-interest. Tilak asks his volunteers to overcome the limited vision of a frog living in a well, disregard the Penal Code, and engage in an extremely high atmosphere of the Gita and idealise the actions of the great men (Ganachari, 1995, p. 602). Perhaps as a consequence, on 22nd June 1897, Chaphekar brothers killed the Plague Commissioner Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst.

Although *Gita Rahasya* was free from any direct communal references, Tilak's emphasis on the sacred text made Muslims distance themselves from his political activism. Before Tilak, several spiritual figures like Madhava, Ramanuja, Dnyaneshwar, Shankara, Vallabha, etc., had interpreted the Gita. Tilak found their interpretation to be sermonising renunciation, quietism, and pessimism (Barucha, as cited in Naik, 2001, p. 452). According to Tilak, man cannot escape his karma or duty, and hence, in *Gita Rahasya*, he upheld action over inaction and devotion. When the nation suffers from internal deterioration and external colonisation, performing sociopolitical action is the *dharma* of individuals (Brown, 1958, p. 198). *Gita Rahasya* was Tilak's attempt to provide people with an indigenous philosophy of national activism over Western nationalist thought. He was aware that, more than nationalist thoughts themselves, it would be a religious text that would encourage more people to engage in

nationalist politics and harbour a revolutionary temperament. While a simple reading of *Gita Rahasya* might show it as a text free from any seditious spirit, what Tilak expressed between the lines and beyond the words can only be decoded by his extremists and militant followers.

To establish the primordiality of the Hindu nation and discard the racial inferiority associated with Indians, Tilak popularised his Vedic research wherein he claimed that Hindus by race are Aryans and hence racially equivalent to the British. In the *Orion or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas,* published in 1893, Tilak referred to celestial phenomena and astronomical references to argue that the Vedas must have been composed earlier than widely accepted. He argues that the Aryan civilisation dates to 6000-4000 BC, and it was called Aditi or the pre-Orion period. He adds:

> The Greeks and the Parsis have retained no traditions of this period, for the simple reason that they carried with them only the calendar which was in force when they left the common home, while the Indian Aryas have preserved all the traditions with a super-religious fidelity and scrupulousness (Tilak, n.d., p. 206).

Tilak's *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903) declares the Arctic as the ancient homeland of all Aryans and glorifies Hindu descent and the folklore of Aryan migration to India. Smith (1988, pp. 24-25) states that the myth of common descent contributes to developing a sense of tribal belongingness among people for having close or same ancestors. It mobilises people more emotionally than rationally by emphasising a common shared past. Such myths are based on legends, half-truths, and fantasies passed down through the generations through epics and chronicles, and they popularise the mythology of origin. Tilak's works intensified the myth of common origin to provide people with a reason to experience the social solidarity and collective nostalgia necessary for a national construction. Such narratives provide ethnic and racial dimensions to cultural nationalism. Tilak relied on the Avesta and the Vedas to rationalise the Aryan origin theory. He argues that when the glacial epoch destroyed the original home of the Aryans, i.e. areas surrounding the North Pole, the Indo-Iranians were compelled to migrate Southwards, leaving their homeland. Travelling through central Asia, they finally settled in the Oxus, Indus, Kubhâ, and Rasâ valleys. When they migrated again, Indians moved to the East while the Persians moved to the West (Tilak, 1903, p. 363).

Mental colonisation is the root of national colonisation. Hence, to eradicate the inferiority complex and bring attitudinal change in the social behaviour of the people, Tilak associated the Indian lineage with the Aryan race, which back then was celebrated as a superior and intelligent human race. 'Hindu primordialist ideas developed in conjunction with evolutionary, 'physiological', and metaphysical notions of the nation...' (Bhatt, as cited in

Krishan, 2011, p. 69). Tilak's theory of Aryan origin was derived from the works of British and German orientalists, such as Max Müller. Krishan (2011, pp. 69-70) states that Tilak's *Orion, The Arctic Home in the Vedas, Gita Rahasya, Vedic Chronology,* and *Vedanta Jyotish* aimed at authenticating the antiquity of the nation. The biological aspect of belonging to the intelligent Aryan race was propagated through an emphasis on Sanskrit, which was eulogised as the source of the greatest philosophies and the language of the gods. It was presented sometimes as a sister of ancient Aryan languages and, at other times, the mother of European languages.

Tilak observed that between 12000 and 6000 B. P. (Before Present), Aryans migrated southward. Between 5000 BC and 3000 BC, the first Vedic hymns were composed. The period between 5000 and 3000 B.P. is called *Kritika* or the Pleiades. Tilak's interpretation of the Pleiades period, which was colder, is supported by the traditions of the Yakut tribe in the Yana river region of eastern Siberia (Madabhushi, 1993, pp. 248-249). While Tilak proudly associated Hindus, preferably belonging to the upper castes, with the Aryan race, Jyotiba Phule in his work *Gulamgiri* (slavery) used the same argumentation to assert that Brahmins were Aryan invaders who captured Indian territories and colonised the native Indians. They imposed *varnashrama dharma*, *dharma shastras*, and untouchability on the original inhabitants and enslaved them by using force and capturing their lands, turning them into peasants and bonded labourers in their own fields. By monopolising education and preaching the myths associated with past lives, they imprisoned the Dravidian population in generational ignorance, taboos, poverty, and hunger. While elites spoke about Ram, Phule spoke about King Bali, the non-Aryan king who established his rule on the principle of egalitarianism. While Tilak chose Ganapati, a predominantly Brahmin deity, Phule emphasised non-Aryan deities like Khandoba, Jyotiba, Martand, and Kalbhairi (Omvedt, 1971, pp. 1973-1974).

Shivaji and Ganesh festivals were the two major annual celebrations that Tilak started during the last decade of the 19th century to foster social cohesion among Hindus. Though Tilak started public celebration of the Ganesh festival on the pretext of bringing together Hindus of all castes to discuss political and nationalist matters, scholars argue that the Ganesh festival was Tilak's mechanism to polarise Hindus and sideline the celebration of Muharram. In the communalised environment of 1892, when Hindus who had earlier been accustomed to participating in Muharram chose not to participate that year, Tilak congratulated them for standing for self-respect. He even congratulated Hindu musicians who, despite being poor and facing losses, preferred not to perform in Muharram (Tilak, 2019, p. 384).

Religious revivalism was the tactic utilised by Tilak to promote religious nationalism. The Ganesh festival has been the most important festival for the Marathi people. Tilak gave this private celebration a public exposure by starting the first *Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav* in September 1893, which immediately became the event of mass public gatherings in Pune and Bombay. It provided a platform to unite Hindus, associate Hinduism with nationalism, and generate anti-British sentiments. On several occasions, communal riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims during the Ganesh processions when Hindus raised anti-Muslim slogans or sang anti-Muslim songs. Tilak opposed the government's order prohibiting the playing of music near mosques (Rao, 2011, p. 26). Shubnam Tejani associated communal riots of Bombay with Tilak's efforts to popularise Shivaji and Ganesh festivals. The Ganesh festival helped establish an ideological space that remained resilient for a long time (Tejani, 2007, cited in Oak, 2022, p. 91). While Shivaji was a Kshatriya icon, Ganesh was predominantly a Brahmin deity (Omvedt, 1971, p. 1973). Despite Tilak trying to unite upper caste and lower caste Hindus, both these festivals remained under the control of Brahmins and Maratha upper castes (Phatak, 2006, as cited in Oak, 2022, p. 97).

The success of the Ganesh festival and its widening popularity convinced Tilak that despite the havoc of social reformers who were turning agnostics day by day, and Christian missionaries spreading their proselytisation work, the common Hindu masses did not lose hold of the religion (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 145). Tilak's initial intention behind the Ganesh festival was to assemble Brahmins of Maharashtra to further the class interests and counter the reformist agenda of progressive Brahmins. Wolpert (1961, as cited in Kaur, 2004, p. 190) states that V. R. Patvardhan, whom Tilak regarded as his mentor, provided inspiration to the Ganesh festival, while Tilak provided perspiration and popularity.

Tilak was accused of using the Ganesh festival to escalate Hindu-Muslim hostilities, which were already emerging into riots between 1891-1894. As the festival was intended to consolidate Hindus and cultivate communal solidarity in the backdrop of Muharram, the Muslim community observed it as a polarisation of Hindus against Muslims. Tilak's provocative campaigns fuelled the Deccan riots (Hasan, 1980, p. 53). Scholars held Tilak guilty of promoting communal riots and widening the chasm between Hindus and Muslims.

> The first serious communal riot… occurred in Bombay in 1893. Tilak at that time was on the warpath. He had not yet revived the Ganpati festival which later did so much to inflame communal feelings, but his speeches had already taken on an anti-Muslim tone and the tension between the two communities was growing… (Griffiths, 1971, as quoted in Menon, 2010, p. 64).

During the last decade of the 19th century, when the festival was at its peak, the idols of Ganesh worshipped in those pandals represented him in a combat position, killing a *rakshasa* or demon, representing British and Muslims alike (Kaur, 2004, pp. 193-195). This form of Ganesh was similar to the iconography of *Kali* associated with the mother nation in Bengal. Such fierce forms of Ganesh were contrary to the pleasant-faced Ganesh idol worshipped at home.

Tilak realised that to construct political consciousness among Hindus as one nation, all sects of Hinduism should be merged to engineer a uniform and homogenous religious-political community. Independently, these sects lacked the numerical strength necessary to actively assert their demands. This move of Tilak came at a time when Indian Muslims started to unite as a separate nation by considering religion as an aspect of nationhood. Hence, for Tilak, if caste aspirations cannot be secured, religious aspirations had to be fought for. He wrote the *Orion* and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* to historicise the Hindu past. The questions pertaining to reforms in the case of caste and untouchability were relegated to prevent feuds between Hindus of lower rank against upper castes. He asserted that unless Hindus form a strong social cohesion, the vision of a sovereign nation-state would not materialise. Tharoor (2023, 38: 25) states that according to Tilak, a Hindu is a person who upholds the Vedas as self-evident and apodictic truths. Even Gandhi developed his definition of Hindu and Hinduism employing Tilak's pre-made conceptualisation.

Asian colonies were fundamentally heterogenous and backwards *gemeinschaften* which lacked historical occurrences like the Renaissance and internal dynamics necessary to transform them into modern industrial nations. Their social sphere was more dominant than the sphere of the state. Hence, the nationalists who formed the decolonial discourse in these societies sought to replace various communal attachments by constructing the nation as the only legitimate and omnipotent object of public loyalty (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 289). Tilak, in his speech delivered on 3rd January 1906 at Banaras, stated that with the term Bharata Dharma Mahamandala, he meant a union of diverse sects of Vedic Sanatan Dharma. Considering religion as the core element of nationality, he asserted that as long as Hindus remain divided in the form of castes and sects, they could not rise as a mighty Hindu nation (Tilak, 2018, pp. 35-36). He spoke about establishing a Hindu university to teach religion and science and starting the practice of Hindu missionaries to preach Hinduism across the world (Tilak, 2018, p. 41). However, subaltern leader Jyotiba Phule critiqued Brahmin nationalists for promoting Aryanised and *savarna*-centric Hinduism, which does not guarantee dignity and equality to Dalit Bahujan people.

Tilak's Swaraj intrinsically meant the merger of Hindu traditionalism and democratic statism. He eulogised India before British and Mughal rule. To prevent racial hostilities and subsequent civil war between lower castes and Brahmins, he did not deliberate much on the Aryan origin theory in his public life. Due to Tilak's obsession with the historicization of the nation, Max Muller stated that 'Tilak lived more in the past than in the present' (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 101). His archetypal claims about the prehistoric existence of the nation also manifested the aptness of the nation to survive in the coming ages based on the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest. Under Tilak's revivalist discourse, the orientalist rhetoric of India as an Aryan civilisation contributed to the 'historicization of the Indian consciousness' (Deshpande & Despande, 2011, p. 1320).

There was a dilemma in Tilak's perception of culture. Though he strongly advocated the retention of traditions and practices, at times, he termed them as irrational dogmas. While on the one side, he glorified traditions as insignias of acknowledgement and honour, on the other side, he accepted the necessity to verify their soundness by subjecting them to logic and reasoning. He criticised the practices harmful to Hindu society (Tahmankar, 1956, p. 49). Tilak, as a member of Congress, was irritated with moderates for their hesitation to openly advocate Hindu nationalism and reliance on secular nationalism. Tilak was in touch with and inspired Bengali revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh (Ganachari, 1995, p. 603). His articulations played a crucial role in the emancipation of pan-India nationalism by overcoming provincial loyalties.

3.7 Heroization of Shivaji and Vilification of Muslims

In Maratha history, Shivaji Maharaj (king) stands as the ultimate symbol of Maratha resilience, courage, and warriorship. Tilak knew that a symbolic representation of a national hero would pull more people into the independence struggle to achieve national sovereignty than mere moderates' dispassionate rhetoric. Although it was M. G. Ranade who started the initial Shivaji festival, it was Tilak who popularised it as a major occasion of cultural nationalism. But before them, it was Jyotiba Phule who discovered Shivaji's tomb at Raigad in 1869 and celebrated the first Shivaji Jayanti in 1870.

Tilak was inspired by the Olympic games of ancient Greece and how they would provide an occasion for Greeks to come together, celebrate gatherings, and restore the spirit of cultural fraternity and patriotism. Tilak had this idea in mind when he decided to elevate the

Shivaji Jayanti and Ganesh Chaturthi into national festivals for the restoration of cultural bonding and nationalistic temperament (Tahmankar, 1956, pp. 60-61). Tilak argued that hero worship is a part of human nature, and it provides strength to political and nationalist aspirations. He found Shivaji as the most suitable swadeshi hero (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 154). The Shivaji festival originated when Tilak and his colleagues started a movement to collect funds in 1895 to restore the tomb of Shivaji at Raigad. The festival celebration began in 1896 (Kelkar, 1928, pp. 287-288; Jog, 2015, p. 41).

Through Shivaji, Tilak linked the nationalistic aspirations of his times with Shivaji's vision of Hindavi swaraj. Within a few years, the festival started getting celebrated in Madras, Banaras, Calcutta, and Karachi (Tahmankar, 1956, p. 65). Tilak was inspired by the writings of Carlyle and compared Shivaji to George Washington, Saint Patrick, and Napoleon Bonaparte (Jasper, 2003, p. 224). Although the legend of Shivaji has been a part of traditional oral forms of expression like ballads, the press publications provided more formality, legitimacy, and wider readership to his legacy as a righteous king and rebel against Muslim rulers (Vartak, 1999, p. 1126). Ranade formed Shivaji's image as a secular king, Phule showed him as a protector of subalterns, and for Tilak, he was a Hindu Maratha warrior. By emphasising Shivaji's Brahmin teacher Ramdas, his Brahmin ministers and advisors, and highlighting Peshwa rulers, Tilak attempted to establish that the Brahmins were socio-politically prominent people, either to be the king or the kingmakers, and their role in politics has been irreplaceable. Despite Peshwas being Chitpavans, Tilak emphasised Shivaji more than Peshwas because they were the ardent adherents of *varnashrama dharma* and, therefore, abhorred by Dalit Bahujans.

Jyotiba Phule was the pioneer of the non-Brahmin movement. He interpreted Maratha history from a Dalit Bahujan perspective, contrary to the version eulogised by Brahmins like Tilak. His historical narrative presents *Kunbis* (cultivators) as marginalised people subjugated by Brahmins and landlords. He used non-Sanskritised Marathi and *Povada* to popularise Shivaji as the protector of the Bahujans (Vartak, 1999, p. 1128). A few words from his poem read: 'I sing the pavada of Bhosale, the jewel of the kulavadis Of Chhatrapati Sivaji' (O'Hanlon, 1983, p.12). Phule glorified Shivaji as *Kulvadi Bhushan*, which means king of the toiling masses or jewel of the Kunbis, against the interpretation of Shivaji by Brahmins as *Go Brahman Pratipalak* or protector of cows and Brahmins. According to Phule, Brahmins coined this term to rationalise their hegemony and spread false patriotism (O'Hanlon, 1983, as cited in Vartak, 1999, p. 1129). While Tilak's Shivaji was a symbol of the Hindu nation, facilitator

of Brahmanism, protector of cows, and a force against Mughals, Phule's Shivaji was a Shudra king who represents the splendid martial past of the lower castes (O' Hanlon, 1983, p. 18). Phule blamed Dadoji Kondadev, a brahmin mentor of Shivaji, for keeping Shivaji illiterate and instructing him to make donations to Brahmins (Kamble, 1982, as cited in Vartak, 1999, p. 1129).

According to Tilak, Shivaji was the protector of Brahmins and cows and the upholder of Brahminical Hinduism (Jasper, 2003, pp. 225-226). While for Tilak, Shivaji's rule denotes the revitalisation of the old social codes and the subsequent Brahmin hegemony, for Phule, Shivaji was the emblem of egalitarianism; hence, he demanded transformation in existing power relations and consideration of the will of the subalterns in the decision-making. Phule's Shivaji is a benevolent king, a modern manifestation of King Bali. Tilak's Shivaji is a warrior, rebel, and follower of *Kshatriya dharma*, who listens to, respects, and protects Brahmins. By stressing the role of Ramdas in the life of Shivaji, Tilak asserted that every King is dependent on Brahmins for intellectual guidance as the latter is the archetype of wisdom (Omvedt, 1971, p. 1973). It was alleged that Tilak replicated the Shivaji festival and Ganesh festival initially started by Phule to unite non-Brahmin masses (Phule, 2022, p. 87).

Tilak strived to construct Shivaji as a national hero and symbol of gallantry. Smith (1988, p. 179) argues that the past and memoirs observed by people are multi-layered and vulnerable to plural understandings, as the past contains varying shades of history. It is impossible to speak of a single monolithic history of any national community. Nationalist discourse possesses the liberty to select from varying and, at times, conflicting sets of traditions and pasts to develop a refined version of the national past to convince the masses. Tilak accordingly nationalised the Shivaji and fabricated his legacy to construct his uniform past to suit his narrative.

Tilak accidentally communalised the legacy of Shivaji within nationalist discourse when he asserted the episode of Shivaji killing Afzal Khan. He held that Afzal Khan's death is something that all Hindus should rejoice in (Rao, 2011, p. 30). In this context, he stated, 'If thieves enter our house and we [do not have] strength enough in our fists to drive them back, we should without hesitation lock them up and burn them alive' (Hasan, 2019, p. 54). He said that Shivaji's action was justified because he committed the act for the greatest good of the greatest number. Such acts are above the principles of morality as the person commits them for the good of society and not for self-interest (Jasper, 2003, p. 225). Shivaji to Tilak was the

protector of the self-respect of Hindus, who gave new direction to Hinduism, and his rule was a resistance against the Mughal state for the independence of the Hindu nation (Hasan, 2019, p. 54).

Tilak's criticism of Afzal Khan was ambiguous. While Tilakites claim that he wanted to associate Khan with colonialism and shift public attention towards British atrocities, his emphasis on Hindu nationalism associated Khan with Indian Muslims, thus hampering Hindu-Muslim relations and vilifying Muslims. He projected Shivaji as a defender of Hinduism from the onslaught of Islam. He started the Shivaji festival to imbibe the revolutionary spirit among the Marathi community. His programme of repairing the tomb of Shivaji and erecting a canopy at Raigad had limited success. Even the Maharaja of Kolhapur, the descendant of Shivaji, did not offer any grants; on the contrary, he commanded raids on the Shivaji clubs established by nationalists (Rao, 2011, pp. 30-31).

Although Tilak was not a direct instigator of Hindu-Muslim hostilities, his cultural fundamentalism contributed to the Hindu-Muslim tensions in the Maratha region. Political theology is the interrelationship and overlap between theological concepts and political authority. Kapila (2021, pp. 17-18) states that 'Tilak's political theology… established a crucial gap between sovereign power and the legal order, with consequences that persist to this day'. Tilak had an obscure relationship with Muslim leaders and the Muslim community throughout his political career. Shivaji festival, Ganesh festival, and Hindu nationalism were the things that created a rift between Tilak and Muslims. In his early writings, he represented Hinduism as the core of the Indian nation and non-Hindus, especially Muslims and Christians, were seen as the hostile others and insignificant minorities. India is a Hindu nation because Hindus form its majority (Hasan, 2019, p. 54). Tilak's speeches were xenophobic, which eventually resulted in a breakout of communal riots in Maharashtra and other parts of the Deccan. Hasan (1980, p. 53) asserts that Tilak's Shivaji festival activated and channelled political energies and simultaneously alienated Muslims. The Ganpati festival intensified communal solidarities.

A major communal riot broke out in August 1893 in Mumbai. Even though two small riots occurred between Muslims and Parsis in 1851 and 1874, on 11th August 1893, a major riot erupted when a large number of Muslims emerged from the Jama Masjid and attacked a Hindu temple in Hanuman Lane (Upadhyay, 1989, p. PE-72). Tilak criticised Muslims assembling at the Jumma Masjid as perpetrators of the riot. In 1890, while mentioning minor communal skirmishes which occurred that year in Belgaum, Tilak portrayed Muslims as

aggressors with fanatical zeal, deliberate attackers, and jealous of Hindus. He also called Hindus vulnerable, lacking unity, and having no leader to defend them (Rao, 2011, p. 19). After the riot of 1893, Tilak blamed the British for their biases against Hindus. Percival Griffiths (quoted in Menon, 2010, p. 64) stated that Tilak's communal tone and anti-muslim rhetoric had developed tensions between the two communities, which contributed to the riots. Tilak defended and argued that Hindus retaliated, not only in self-defence but to show Muslims the vindictive power of offended Hindus (Rao, 2011, p. 21). He stated that if Maharashtrian Hindus are given a free hand, they are sufficiently capable of making Muslims respect the rights of the Hindu community. When *The Times of India* asked both Hindus and Muslims to dissolve their defence committees created to help their co-religionists tried as accused, Tilak blamed the press for asking Hindus to surrender to the fanaticism of Muslims (Rao, 2011, p. 22).

On 18th September of the same year, riots broke out in Yeola. The Patel Mosque and the Muralidhar temple were destroyed. When the District Administration concluded the compromise between Hindus and Muslims of Yeola by inviting twelve representatives of each side to bring peace and order, Tilak blamed it as a one-sided compromise. He asserted that Muslims of Yeola repeatedly violate the sanctity of Hindu temples (Rao, 2011, pp.23-24). Tilak organised the Ganapati festival to unite Hindus on religious grounds in the aftermath of communal riots. He asserted the right of Hindus to play music during processions and argued that Hindus do not need to stop music in front of mosques. He asked Hindus to cut their ties with Muslims and asked Hindus to boycott them socially. Secular reformers blamed Tilak for deliberately provoking animosity between Hindus and Muslims (Rao, 2011, pp. 25-26). Beni Prasad, referring to revivalism in India, highlights that two cultural revivalist movements emerged side by side, competed and contradicted each other, and became hostile as years passed. Social practices which promoted communal harmony gradually faded, leaving space for Hindu solidarity, Muslim solidarity, and Hindu-Muslim communalism (Mujahid, 1999, pp. 91-92).

3.8 Ideological Metamorphosis: From Sacred to Secular

Tilak's ideational universe was as complex as it was contradictory. His defence of Hindu practices and codes, despite some of them being dogmatic, inhuman, and irrational, projects his efforts to uphold the cultural distinctiveness of the Hindu nation. Accepting the social reforms and adapting to Western manners would have robbed the culture of its peculiarities

and thus would have weakened the crusade for cultural sovereignty. Cultural sovereignty was the precondition of national sovereignty. Tilak, in his private life, agreed to the rationale of the reformers, but in public spaces, he strictly maintained an orthodox stance when he opposed bills such as the Age of Consent. This not only helped him carve a distinct space for himself in the political sphere dominated by moderates but also provided him with support from the conservative segment. His swaraj aimed at the amalgamation of political democracy and social traditionality. Despite his inner acknowledgement of the need for social change, from his actions, Tilak emerged as a voice of Brahminical conservatism and patriarchal machismo.

Prior to his Mandalay imprisonment, which lasted from 1908-1914, Tilak retained either a casteist stance or was an advocate of Hindu nationalism. Dalit Bahujan and Muslim leaders were always sceptical of Tilak's advocacies. He was so fundamentalist that he chose to undergo penance for drinking a tea offered by Christians during a lecture at Panch Houd Mission School in Pune in 1891 (Bhagwat & Pradhan, 2016, p. 95). Although Tilak projected himself as the voice of orthodoxy and opposed progressive social reforms, he was inherently liberal. Despite his immense knowledge of religious scriptures, which he often used to contest the reformers' demands and state decrees, he was not truly ritualistic.

While reformers viewed him as a social reactionary for his opposition to bills such as the Age of Consent and efforts towards girls' education, the hyper-conservatives did not find him orthodox enough, as some of his actions were unacceptable to them. Damodar Hari Chapekar, one of the three Chapekar brothers who were hanged for the murder of Rand and Ayerst, stated that Tilak is neither an honest Hindu nor a Yavan (foreigner). He is neither a true reformer nor is he completely orthodox. He is the friend of the beef-eater Daji Abaji Khare. It would be least likely for anyone to see him listening to a *kirtan* or visiting a temple. His actions are dishonourable and incompatible with a man who calls himself religious (More, 2018, p. 50). While he showed resistance towards women's and girls' education, he admitted his daughters to schools and permitted them to receive an English education. He who opposed the Age of Consent bill, which demanded to increase the age of consent for intercourse from ten to twelve years, got his daughters married not before they turned sixteen (Tahmankar, 1956, p. 49).

Tilak evolved over time and emerged as a secular, democratic, and liberal thinker. He shed his stubborn orthodoxy and began to embrace change. Tilak, who once threatened to prosecute Agarkar for stating that Tilak had tea offered by a Portuguese waiter, later started

drinking tea prepared and served by Muslims (Naik, 2000-2001, p. 692). After his release from Mandalay jail in 1914, Tilak modified his stand on cultural assertions, Hindu nationalism, means of resistance, and Swaraj. The erstwhile extremist was becoming moderate. The most plausible reasons for this transition include, firstly, he changed his ideational stand from emotional extremism to logical pragmatism. Secondly, the newly emerging Dalit-Bahujan and Muslim consciousness was combating Brahminical social hegemony and political dominance. Thirdly, the rise of the Muslim League and the polarisation of Muslims had diverted the focus of the nationalist mobilisation from an anti-colonial crusade to internal power dynamics, which weakened the demand for total decolonisation. Fourthly, Tilak acknowledged that Muslims constitute the second-highest religious community in India, and it would be practically impossible to wipe out traces of Islamic culture from Indian culture. To stop the further bifurcation of the national movement on communal lines, he followed a secular approach towards politics. By the time he was released from Mandalay, he had lost his earlier group of colleagues and volunteers, and hence, to rebuild a fresh campaign against colonial rule, he needed the support of Muslim leaders as well. Hence, he extended his support to the Khilafat movement (Pagdi, 2019, p. 67). The Congress Democratic Party (a group within INC), formed by him in 1920, adhered to secularism, religious freedom, and Hindu-Muslim amity. His Home Rule League received the support of Muslim leaders like M. A. Jinnah. The League sent Joseph Baptista, a non-Hindu, to Britain as its spokesman (Inamdar, 1985, p. 391).

Tilak's and Besant's Home Rule movement laid the foundation for reconciliation between various competing groups through the secularisation of politics and a religiously neutral objective, so that even nationalist Muslims polarised under the Muslim League could join (Owen, 1972, p. 573). Tilak was attempting to repeal the disruptive consequences of the communal nationalism that he asserted between 1890 to 1907. Tilak was interested in the 'process of expediting Hindu-Muslim understanding in the twentieth century' (Yadav, 2011, p. 40). Even his *Gita Rahasya*, published in 1915, was free from any direct communal considerations. In the case of communal riots in the Arrah region of Bihar in 1917, Gandhi and Tilak blamed Hindu radicals for the violence committed against Muslims (Yadav, 2011, p. 48).

Tilak played a crucial role in the Lucknow Pact of 1916, which brought the Congress and the Muslim League together. M. A. Ansari held that the stand taken by Tilak during the Lucknow Pact represented his openness and large-mindedness towards the Indian Muslims (Yadav, 2011, p. 51). Tilak supported the proposal for separate electorates for Muslims. The Lucknow Pact also united Moderates and Extremists, creating new hope for Tilak's Home Rule

movement. Tilak's shift from Swaraj to Home Rule is a shift from cultural nationalism to composite nationalism. He and Jinnah played a convincing part in the readmission of extremists into a moderate-dominated Congress during 1915-16 (Owen, 1972, p. 575). Tilak softened his call for complete swaraj or self-rule. From complete national sovereignty, he shifted his demand towards Home Rule, which stated that India would retain dominion status, Indians would have equal citizenship, an internal elected government, and India would be a part of the British Commonwealth. He and Annie Besant formed two separate Home Rule Leagues in 1916, with Tilak restricting his work to Maharashtra and neighbouring areas, while Besant worked in other parts of India. Home Rule aspired for India a self-government within the British Empire (Bevir, 1991, p. 352). On the foundation led by Tilak in the form of a mass movement for political reforms, Gandhi developed his course of action. On the other hand, the Hindu radical faction, which wanted nothing less than Hindu India and Hindu supremacy, strengthened in the form of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha.

3.9 Conclusion

Tilak was a calculative realist who modified his hegemony-centric articulations according to the spirit of time and space. In the initial phase, his social orthodoxy was directed towards protecting Brahminical hegemony by opposing social reforms which refuted caste status as a genuine qualifier of social power. He promoted cultural revivalism and re-invented the doctrine of the caste system. He engaged patriarchy in the domain of power distribution and opposed the deliberation of women-centric issues in the political space. In the post-1900 era, when Muslims emerged as major contenders for power and Dalit-Bahujan consciousness began to look at the state as its protector against Brahminical social slavery, he sidelined his casteist approach and started advocating Hindu nationalism against Muslims' political assertions. He knew that caste divisions would split the Hindu population into small fragments, which independently could not compete with Muslims' demands. Taking a U-turn from his original position, which justified caste hierarchy, he tried to delegitimise the horizontal polarisation of the caste system by demanding the organisation of caste Hindus and untouchables as a single political community. In the post-Mandalay phase, when Tilak realised the futility of 'extremism' and the danger of communal concentration, he started speaking about secular nationalism, Home Rule, and the confederacy of Hindus and Muslims for joint action.

Chapter – 4

Rabindranath Tagore on State Centric Nationalism and Universalist Aspirations

4.1 Introduction

The populist revolutions of the 18th century and the introduction of popular representation and universal suffrage opened the gates of politics for commoners and catalysed politico-communal consciousness among them, who began to revere the state and the collectivity. The devotion towards the state and communal solidarity contributed to the nascence of nationalist ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and colonialism. This era witnessed the growth of ideological dichotomy, with one segment of ideologues eulogising nationalism and unhindered devotion to the state and the other segment objurgating nationalist indoctrination and endorsing the age of post-nationalism. During the early decades of the 20th century, Rabindranath Tagore rose to prominence as a solitary but vigorous opponent of nationalism and subsequent mass psychosis. His vehement denunciation of the nationalist discourse and outright rejection of nationalism as the epitome of human progress represented his moral apostasy. This chapter explores Tagore's socio-political philosophy, reflections on nationalism, and universalist aspirations. This chapter explores Tagore's transcendentalist vision of India and the world. The chapter also reflects on Tagore's experimentation at Sriniketan and Santiniketan.

Being a child of the Bengali Renaissance, Tagore was associated with the Bengali nationalist movement when it was still in its early phase, venerating the motherland in the tranquil form of *Prakriti* (nature). In the wake of the swadeshi movement, when the creed of nationalism began to assume an aggressive character and the territory started getting expressed as blood-thirsty *Kali*, Tagore not only retreated from the movement but surfaced as its staunch detractor. Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali polymath, widely referred to as *Gurudev,* was born on 7th May 1861 in a landlord-class *Pirali* Brahmin family to *Maharshi* Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. Debendranath was a pioneering figure of the Brahmo Samaj, established by Raja Rammohan Roy, also known as the father of the Indian Renaissance. Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarakanath Tagore, was a zamindar, a successful merchant, and an entrepreneur. Tagore's family estate extended across areas such as Sahajadpur, Patisar, Kustia, Silaidaha, and Kumarkhali, and possessed some tracts also in the Cuttack district of Odisha (Ganguly, 2014, p.139).

Rabindranath's life legacy comprises diverse endeavours he successfully attempted throughout his life. He was a great poet and had penned several short stories, plays, novels, and patriotic songs. He was a singer and composer par excellence, an educationist, a painter, and a reformer. In 1913, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. He predominantly wrote in the Bengali language but occasionally preferred to translate some of his works into English. The profundity and magnitude of his literature can be acknowledged from the fact that when the Oxford University conferred the Honorary degree on him in 1940, some of the words of the commendation read, 'Here before you is the myriad-minded poet and writer' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 5). Much of his philosophy and alternative visions have been embedded in his literature and speeches spanning over a period from the 1880s till his demise in 1941. Catlin (1961, p. 618) rightly claimed that Tagore belonged to '…that great tradition which includes Aristotle, Aquinas, Leonardo, Diderot and Goethe…'. His collection of poems titled *Gitanjali,* published in 1910*,* is a piece of world literature which dwells on the theme of devotion and spiritualism and is also a part of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. Tagore, as a poet, has been equated with Francis Thompson, W. B. Yeats, George Russell, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Heine, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Maeterlinck, Walt Whitman, and Kipling (Shahane, 1963, pp. 53-54). His thoughts are the culmination of European and Asian philosophies. He was influenced by the Bhakti movement, Vaishnavism, Upanishads, Sanskrit literature, Sufi poets, and the Bengali Renaissance, and yet he developed his own philosophy of universal humanism. Tagore's philosophy fuses reality, compassion, and art with the divine in man for his wholesome development.

Tagore contributed immensely to the Bengali literary renaissance. His works, such as *Gora, Ghare Baire,* and *Gitanjali,* among others, generated a new sense of fascination towards art, literature, and aesthetics. His ideational world was profoundly shaped by the thoughts of the great personalities of Bengal, which included Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and his father, Debendranath Tagore. Young Rabindranath had long been associated with the Brahmo Samaj and imbibed faith in monism. He grew up in a cosmopolitan familial environment, which deeply moulded his universal outlook. Dasgupta (p. 9, as cited in Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 8) states that the Tagore family represented a synergy of three distinct cultures, i.e. Hindu, British, and Muslim. The multicultural character of his family persuaded Tagore to retain a secular and liberal perspective towards politics, social convictions, and public life and, in unison, he recognised plurality as an indispensable aspect of human civilisation. He, in the true sense, was a post-

nationalist and post-modernist. Tagore lived in the midst of Bengali history when the social forces of culture were transforming into forces of fierce nationalism, the heterogeneity of the community was conflicting with the nationalist aspirations for homogeneity, and the revolutionaries were not only archetypically deifying the nation by placing it above the humanity but also glamourising the culture of blood and bones as an effective solution to eradicate colonial system. In the chaos of nationalism, Tagore developed the alternative vision of India, humanity, and the world. Due to his nonconformist beliefs and condemnation of nationalist discourse, prominent leaders of his time did not strongly participate in his endeavours.

4.2 Indian Nationalism and Tagorean Dissidence

If nationalism and national consciousness are rooted in elitism, xenophobia, manifestation of power, totalitarianism, fascism, subjection of individuality to collective imprudence, and cumulative sentiments of racial superiority, then Tagore was not a nationalist in any sense. While for the nationalists, India's decolonisation should be followed by India's construction as a nation-state, Tagore viewed decolonisation and nationalism as two distinct phenomena. Although he fully defended Indians' desire for freedom from colonial control, he was opposed to the idea of building India as a nation with a centralised state. For him, if India becomes a nation, it will no longer be the India all imagined, experienced, and cherished. Tagore believed that social reformation and social reconstruction are the prerequisites of India's political liberation, and its independence should be succeeded by the humanistic and spiritualistic elevation of humankind. The dichotomy of nationalism, which divides social milieu into opposite compartments of ours and theirs, native and alien, and Indian and non-Indian, was not acceptable to Tagore. The practice of bisecting cultures and ideas merely on the parameters of the borders of the state was unacceptable to him; rather, he strongly emphasised cultural reciprocity between the East and the West. Unlike Western-style reformers, he emphasised focus on enlightened ideas originating from the Upanishadic school of thought and the Bhakti movement to provide intellectual support to social engineering. While cultural nationalists like Tilak looked at history and revivalism to restore hegemony and elitism, Tagore considered ancient texts to deduce humanistic values. He observed that the Indian national movement 'was both innovative and non-conformist because it drew on the ancient texts which were dismissed as archaic by those who believed in the Enlightenment values' (Chakrabarty, 2021,

p. 5). Despite his emphasis on Indic values and Indian culture, he was not equivalent to the cultural nationalists who desired homogeneity. Instead, he criticised them for working to replace India's colourful and natural diversity with uniform, artificial, and lifeless homogeneity. He also detested the characterisation of the national movement as Hindu nationalism.

Tagore was critical of the path of militancy, terrorism, and political murders adopted by nationalist revolutionaries as the quickest approach to decolonisation. He found these mechanisms to be shortcuts undertaken by volunteers which will lead them nowhere. He held that the efforts of the nationalists were mainly negative in nature as they only aimed at the deconstruction of colonialism but had no blueprint for social reconstruction. He also found the swadeshi programme and the call for the boycott of English goods a futile effort (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 94-96). It was before Gandhi's conception of *ahimsa* came into prominence that Tagore disputed the violent methods adopted by volunteers and asked nationalists to come out of their elite morality and engage with subalterns to receive their genuine support. Although Tagore was involved in political activities since the last decade of the 19th century, he became more prominent during the days of the partition of Bengal when he took up the cultural leadership of the Swadeshi movement in 1905. In the wake of averting the partition of Bengal, putting ahead the demand for swaraj and swadeshi, and morally supporting the national struggle, he wrote a series of essays and poems. Some important works of his from this time comprise *Atma-sakti, Bharatvarsha, Raja Praja, Swadesh, Siksha, Chokher Bali,* etc. (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Tagore retreated from national politics and the swadeshi movement by 1907-08. There were certain reasons for his abrupt withdrawal from the active protests. Firstly, the Indian National Congress had divided into moderate and extremist factions. Secondly, the swadeshi programme, in due course, became highly influenced by Hindu religious expressions and abandoned its original secular disposition, which alienated Muslims. Thirdly, the militants and revolutionaries were pursuing the path of terrorism and political murders, demonstrating their faith in the principle that the end justifies the means. Fourthly, his discontentment with both factions of Congress resulted in his seclusion inside the political circle. Finally, his alternative vision of India did not receive the necessary attention and support from the national leaders (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.11). He was displeased with the romanticisation of the cult of violence in Bengal. He even doubted the intentions of leaders. The character Sandip in Tagore's *Ghare-Baire* represents a self-centred and manipulative leader who uses the domain of masculine

nationalism for self-gratification and whose claims were emotionally charged but morally dubious. Chakrabarti (1986, p. 172) argues that 'What he [Tagore] deprecated was the practice of creating a mystique around patriotism so as to inebriate rather than inspire the adherents to the revolutionary order'.

Tagore denounced the idealisation of violence. He disapproved of the militant approach of Rash Behari Bose and Subhash Chandra Bose and condemned Japanese aggressive nationalism and Mussolini's Fascism in Italy (Sen, 2006, pp. 109-112). He found Indian revolutionaries accentuating terrorism to subvert colonialism rather than developing affirmative alternative routes of resistance. In his works *Path o Patheya* (Ends and Means) and *Char Adhyay* (Four Episodes), Tagore lambasted Bengali nationalists who believed that violence, assassinations, and secret actions are the authentic emblems of patriotism, bravery, and a pragmatic solution to the colonial problem. He observed that though this path appears as a shortcut, it lacks rationale and is nothing less than a suicide (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 11-12). He asserted that if the nationalism of the coloniser is prejudicial and exploitative, the nationalism of the colonised is also not free from violent instincts and greed for power. This revelation convinced him to withdraw from the national struggle when the swadeshi movement started to turn communal and narcissistic, having no composite vision for the future. He found the burning of foreign clothes as a symbol of the boycott to be a bizarre act. When the poor could not afford to buy indigenously produced swadeshi clothes due to their higher cost, forcing them to buy the same was unacceptable to Tagore, for it was founded on coercion rather than voluntariness. He was also deeply saddened by the act of Khudiram Bose, who killed two innocent English women when he attempted to kill Magistrate Douglas Kingsford by hurling a bomb (Quayum, 2006, p. 42). He asserted that the people who are intoxicated by nationalism are disillusioned as they think of themselves as free men but are sacrificing their freedom and humanity for nationalism (Tagore, 2009, p. 21). Before becoming aware of the wrath of nationalist hooliganism during the days of swadeshi, he was deeply influenced by the ideas of Tilak, Aurobindo, and Bipin Chandra Pal and sceptical of moderates (Kar, 2020, p.19).

Tagore was a utopian anarchist and enlightened post-modernist who idealised a stateless and self-governing society. He affirmed that the welfare role of the state should be performed by society, as was the practice in ancient India. Mutual help and collaboration should be the ideals of this society, where collective welfare would be the principal goal of community life (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 142). Hence, he stated that Indians will find true India only when they free their minds from the prophecies that taught them that the nation is the

object of worship and is above the truth and humanity (Tagore, 2009, p. 58). He condemned the practice of caste and untouchability followed across India. He asserted that such a practice prevents us from looking at others on equal terms, sacrifices the lives of some for the privileges of others, and makes us indifferent towards the exploitation and misery of our countrymen. When people genuinely obey such divisions and form innumerable walls and hierarchies of castes and sub-castes, it is impossible for them to rise above such follies and contribute to the collective good (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 60-61). Tagore was critical of conservative temperament, ritualism, and people's obsession with continuing the superannuated practices without questioning their rationale. Such a social culture imprisons the minds of people and does not let them experience true humanism. Tagore expressed this theme in his work *Kartar Bhoot* (Sen, 2006, pp. 98-99).

Tagore, who had left the national movement after the radicalisation of the Swadeshi movement, returned to national politics in 1919 in the wake of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Rowlatt Act, the imposition of martial law in Punjab, and Gandhi's satyagraha movement. Through his writings, lectures, and letters, he began to condemn the actions and legislation of the colonial government. From the 1930s onwards, he inculcated thematic change in his writing. His works were now primarily concerned with the themes of humanism, universalism, and integralism. Tagore's journey makes it evident that even when he was isolated by nationalists as his vision did not match theirs, he continued his efforts in the spirit of '*Ekla Chalo re'*.

In a pre-Swadeshi era, Tagore was involved in a nationalist campaign. He made a public speech in 1893, which had a nationalistic tone. In 1896, he sang *Vande Mataram* at the session of the Indian National Congress. In 1897, he established Swadeshi Bhandar to encourage handicrafts. In 1898, he was one of the spokespersons nominated to speak on the Sedition Bill. During these years, he also wrote certain political articles in journals such as *Sadhana, Bharati*, and *Bangadarshana* of which he was also an editor. Some of these articles were later republished in books titled *Atma-sakti, Bharatvarsha, Raja-Proja, Patheya*, etc. (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 44). Sumit Sarkar argues that the communal riots in Comilla, East Bengal, and other parts of Bengal shook the conscience of Tagore, who saw nationalism as the progenitor of aggression and broke away from the mass movement in 1907. Although Tagore left the anti-colonial protests during the second half of the first decade of the 20th century, Tanika Sarkar argues that he did not concretely develop his critique of nationalism for the next few years. Bengal was reunited in 1911, and from 1915 onwards, he started demonstrating his ideational

stand against nationalism (Saha, 2013, p. 5). His work '*Nationalism',* published in 1917, was a compilation of the series of lectures he delivered in America between 1916 and 1917, condemning the ideology of nationalism.

When the national movement turned communal, Tagore advocated building communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. During the partition of Bengal, Tagore insisted that Hindus and Muslims tie *Rakhis* to each other as a mark of fraternity. In *Bharat Tirtha*, he urged Indians across religion, race, caste, and class to unite to fulfil the noble cause of India by transgressing the walls of politics (Quayum, 2006, p. 44). The mental and muscular pressure to cease the use of foreign clothes and purchase swadeshi clothes, the former being cheaper and the latter costlier, impacted many Muslims who were extremely poor. The Swadeshi campaign highlighted the existing class conflict on religious lines in Bengal (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 144-145). Once, when Gandhi visited Tagore and requested him to support his non-violent protests, Tagore, highlighting the moral hypocrisy of his volunteers, told him:

> Look down there and see what your non-violent followers are up to. They have stolen cloth from the shops in the Chitpore Road, they've lit that bonfire in my courtyard and are now howling round it like a lot of demented dervishes. Is that non-violence? (Elmhirst, 2023, p. 15).

In opposition to the Swadeshi outburst, Tagore developed his concept of Swadeshi samaj. Unlike the Swadeshi of nationalists grounded in the destruction of English goods, Tagore's Swadeshi emphasised the creation of local goods for sustainable living.

While the cultural nationalists had developed distrust towards Muslims and Islamic culture, Tagore's ideational universe was free from such prejudicial contaminations. He once wrote:

> I know many Muslims, and I respect them. Many are intelligent, humorous, liberal, creative, thoughtful, and experienced in literature of many languages… whether they are Hindu or Muslim, this discrimination had never arisen in my mind; I only know them as human (Khan, 2009, p. 359 as quoted in Pozza, 2016, p. 199).

Golam Mustafa asserted that the ideals and thoughts of Tagore have been compatible with Islam, and hence, any Muslim can embrace his ideas as there is no anti-Islamic bigotry in his literature. Kazi Abdul Wadud proclaimed that though Tagore did not write explicitly about Islam and its philosophy in his literature, he is still a non-sectarian intellectual as he did not write extensively about the dogma of any other religion as well (Khan, 2009, as cited in Pozza, 2016, p. 203). He visited various Islamic countries and shared affinities with devotional Persian poets and Sufi poetry (Pozza, 2016, p. 204). In his works, such as *Kabuliwalla, Gora*, etc., he

presented a humanist picture of Muslims, distinct from the portrait developed by Hindu cultural nationalists. In *Ghare-Baire*, he criticised Swadeshi strategies as they affected poor Muslims and small Muslim traders. Noorani (1973, p. 1039) states that when the Vande Mataram controversy emerged in 1937 within the circle of the Indian National Congress as the Muslim members of INC were outraged with the singing of Vande Mataram, as the poem was associated with Goddess Durga; Rabindranath Tagore and Subhash Chandra Bose suggested that only initial two stanzas of the poem, which have no association with any religion, should be sung in future. Tagore was deeply upset with the burgeoning schism between Hindus and Muslims, which was preventing them from uniting for a higher cause. For Hindus, the Muslims were impure and less Indian, and for Muslims, a Hindu is *Kafir* or infidel (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 61). He advocated the separation of politics and religion and argued that a country where religion is the foundation of unity is the most unfortunate society. He stood for the secularisation of the freedom movement (Chattopadhyay & Chattopadhyaya, 1991, p.782)

Unlike Bankim, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo, and Vivekananda, who deified the nation in the form of Goddess *Kali*, a manifestation of wilderness and ruthless power over tranquillity, Tagore venerated Lakshmi, an elegant and life-giving manifestation of feminine cosmic energy (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 8). Since Tagore kept himself away from the programmes of the nationalists, some viewed him as a defender of British rule. Such accusations are fallacious, as in his letter to Viceroy Lord Chelmsford in the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, he stated that 'The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments…' (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 12).

Tagore used *Bharatvarsh* as a name for the Indian subcontinent, keeping in mind its cultural and civilizational significance. However, one should remember that his emphasis on using historical nomenclature was based on his perception of India as a transcending, holistic, and inclusive society and not an institutionalised nation in a European sense. He recognised the nation or *Desh* in two senses: provincial and pan-India. At one point, he recognises *Bharatvarsha* as the cradle of ancient civilisation, and at another point in his poem *Amar Sonar Bangla*, he expresses his affection for Bengal. But in both cases, he imagines them as social nations and not political entities. Tagore's poem expresses his love for the motherland, while Bankim's *Vande Mataram* worships the motherland. Although both penned down the lyrics in adoration of the motherland, Bankim set forth the creed of cultural nationalism, and Tagore challenged the very idea of the nation. A possible explanation for Tagore's disagreement with

the idea of a nation as a divine mother could be deduced from the fact that, as a follower of Brahmo Samaj, monism, and monotheism, Tagore believed in the formless, universal, and omnipotent God who does not rest in any form or entity.

There is a paradox in his works. While his works like *Nationalism* surface as a harsh denouncer of nationalism, his patriotic poems have been a source of the sheer enthusiasm which invigorated nationalists. The poems and patriotic songs which he penned down before 1907 were full of nationalistic fervour. From pacifist Gandhi to militant nationalists and even those imprisoned volunteers retained their spirit of fighting by singing Tagore's poems. Despite his anti-national articulations, Tagore had been an unofficial national poet of India (Nandy, 2006, p. 3500). Tagore's patriotism represented the love for the motherland, like the love between mother and child, rather than a patriarchal masculine urge to claim, domesticate, and dominate women and territory. Tagore asserted that historically, India is a politically and culturally plural territory; hence, converting it into a single nation or attempting to define its identity within an immobile framework would be a futile exercise. Saha states that because Tagore rejected nationalism as a way to organise people, it did not mean that he rejected the compelling idea of India. What he feared was the construction of India within the rigid structural model developed by the imperial powers. He believed that the emotional and natural connection which people have towards their country gets destroyed by the numbing effect of nationalism (Saha, 2013, p.15). Tagore differentiated between *Bharat* and India. While he objected to the emergence of India as an organised nation-state, which would trap social life in politically dictated configurations and construct divisive ethics, Tagore celebrated the idea of *Bharat* as a cosmopolitan civilisation which is distinctly native and hitherto equally universal by its ability to adapt and tolerate. Bhattacharya (2016, p.42) states that Tagore's *Bharatvarsher Itihas* is his '…first statement of the idea of India as a syncretic civilisation, accommodating plurality and diversity, the idea which became a part of the nationalist creed in later times'.

Tagore was critical of the non-cooperation movement for its coercive nature and lack of constructive activism. He saw the burning of foreign clothes as a sin and the boycotting of British schools by students as utter foolishness (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 61-62). He believed that the *Charkha* neither had any economic nor symbolic efficiency (Purkayastha, 2017, pp. 69-70). He believed that non-cooperation and the Swadeshi movement were negative in nature; they appealed to sentiments instead of reason and chose conceit over sympathy. Their success clearly discloses the defeat of the non-conformists by the hysterical mob (Somjee, 1961, p. 142). Tagore found *Charkha* colonising the minds of cultivators. For the man believing in

creativity, spinning is a mechanical and dead movement, turning the spinners themselves into a mechanical movement (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 63-64). On the other hand, Tagore's Swadeshi Samaj represents a self-reliant village community where all engage in activities of their expertise and fondness, where productivity is equally cheerful and meaningful, unlike the spinning, and each one contributes to society the fruit of their excellence.

Tagore was sceptical of the Congress for two reasons, and both represent the elitism prevalent in the association. Firstly, all their business would be carried out in the English language, least known by Indians. Secondly, all their ideas and social reform programmes were for argumentative purposes, with little contribution at the grassroots level. They would discuss wholeheartedly during their three-day annual session and disappear till the next annual session (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 145). On the other hand, Tagore practised his preachings at Sriniketan and Santiniketan. Tagore was critical of *Bhadralok* politics prevalent in Bengal, where *Bhadralok* or middle-class nationalists were manoeuvring the bureaucracy and other political institutions by detaching themselves from the masses. He found such persons ignorant of their national heritage, which made them distance themselves from nativity, vernacular, and art. He had the same contentions towards local political associations, such as the Bengal Provincial Congress, for preferring to converse in English over other languages of India. While the politics in Bengal province was dominated by *Bhadralok*, who, despite their talks, had retained elitism, Tagore was content to associate himself with the subalterns and pleased to witness commoners singing his songs. Like Fletcher of Saltoun, he was satisfied by gifting people his songs rather than being a lawmaker (Catlin, 1961, p.618).

4.3 Tagore's Insights on Nationalism in his Literary Works: *Gora* and *Ghare Baire*

Tagore's disapproval of the entire edifice of nationalism and his discontentment with the compartmentalisation of people by labelling them as separate nations were clearly visible in his acclaimed works *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire* (The Home and The World). Tagore's man is a universal man; his persona is cosmopolitan, and contextually, it was unfair, as per Tagore, to imprison the stature of a person's identification and his creative imagination to a specific territory called the nation. It is unfair to restrain the spiritual potentiality of man from associating with the whole of mankind by transgressing the walls of parochialism. While *Gora* represents the enlightenment and intellectual metamorphosis of a person named Gora who eventually embraces the universal character by overcoming his celebrated insularity, *Ghare*

Baire represents how, despite its heavily compelling pomposity and periodic emotional surcharges, the narrative of nationalism is emotionally void and intellectually barren. *Ghare Baire* also tells that in the name of nationalism and through the politics of nationalism, manipulative and selfish leaders fulfil their interests by making the innocent masses a sacrificial lamb with their grandiloquence.

Gora (1910) is the story of Gormohan alias Gora, who was a conformist Brahmin, a strong believer of orthodox Hinduism, social taboos, the caste system, untouchability, and a critic of Brahmo Samaj. The novel represents the complexities of human emotions, thoughts, actions, and relations in an environment of social chaos. The story delves into various themes such as feminism, orthodoxy, debauchery, love, friendship, and identity within the circle of nationalism. Gora was a hardcore nationalist and an opponent of British colonialism. The story ends with Gora's world turning upside down when he realises, in the end, that he was neither a pure Brahmin nor a pure Indian, as he was the son of a Christian Irishman who died in a war, and he was brought up by his adopted father. Sarkar (2009, p. 42) states that, as per some historians, the persona and ideational universe of Gora represents Swami Vivekananda as both tried to socially uplift lower caste masses with the efforts of the upper castes, developed patriotic prose, organised middle-class youth for nationalist activism, associated patriotism with Hindu pride, and despite having scepticism about Hindu social institutions, repressed themselves from condemning them publicly to protect the image of great Hindu civilisation. The character of Gora as a nationalist was partially based on Tagore when he was involved in the Swadeshi movement before it turned communal and classist, making him discrete himself from its tactics and condemn it rigorously in his works.

Gora represents the dilemma and cognitive dissonance of any nationalist. It was written against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement, *Anandamath*, and Hindu nationalism, which dominated the symbolic and ideational space of Indian nationalism. Gora defines patriotism in a new sense, challenging the notion of cultural essentialism (Sarkar, 2009, p. 37). *Gora*, *Nationalism*, *Chaar Adhyaay, Ghare Baire,* and *Path O Patheya* are some of the most significant works of Tagore, which questioned the judiciousness of nationalist lunacy, collective aggression, methods of resistance, patriotic arrogance, self-righteousness, and denunciation of anything that is termed foreign under the prism of Swadeshi. Tagore preached the message of peace, multiculturalism, global family, humanity, and integralism in these texts.

Gora stresses the value of love beyond the obsession with the nation. It explores the idea of individual freedom and intrinsically explores the overlapping problems of social, emotional, and political nature. It distinguishes patriotism from nationalism and Indianness from Hinduness (Sarkar, 2009, p. 38). This novel also depicts the secularism, humanity, and tolerance that deeply exist in the hearts of the common masses, which he showed through a local Hindu barber who takes care of Pharu's wife and his son Tamiz, a Muslim family (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 304-305). Gora represents paradoxes that existed in the minds of Bengali nationalists over making a choice between religion and secularism, homogeneity and multiculturalism, militancy and passive resistance, inclusive nationalism and exclusive recognition of the motherland, modernity and traditionality, change and status quo, reforms and reactions, etc.

In the end, Gora comes to know about his Irish-Christian lineage when his foster father, Krishnadayal Babu, reveals the truth of his origin. Gora's life takes a startling twist when he, a devout orthodox Hindu with a strong aversion to Christians, discovers that he was, in fact, born a Christian. A proud Indian nationalist, in fact, belonged to Irish lineage. This revelation left him feeling like an outsider within the Hindu community he had always taken pride in. With a single stroke, he falls into the other side of the binary where he loses his religion, caste, nation, and identity (Chatterjee, 2005, p. 194). This existential crisis and the absurdity of self-identity bring total reformation in his life. He ameliorates his idea of India and with it, his own worldview. From a sectarian, he then comes to see himself as Indian and through that Indianness, he becomes a world citizen. Now for Gora:

> His country is no longer a fortress of ancient faith to be defended against foreign and internal enemies, but the perennial India of the confluence of nations and nationalities, creeds and communities, and a mystic unity in its manifold diversities. It is a joyous temple from where he welcomes the world (Chatterjee, 2005, p. 195).

Gora represents the people of this country, who are confused about choosing between *Bharat* as a civilisation and India as a nation-state, between natural tolerance and cultivated pride, and between humanist acceptance and communal exclusion. After Gora's identity construct breaks, he starts to realise the open-heartedness and humanism of his mother Anandamoyi. He hopes that Anandamoyi's tolerance and compassion will be reflected in *Bharatbarsa*, his adoptive country (Jahan, 2005, pp. 72-73). The novel also reflects on the philosophy of existentialism. It makes the reader question the authenticity and worth of the meanings and identities people add to their lives, for which they also get ready to die and kill,

only to not realise their ambiguities and the absurdity of existence. When Gora grapples with the vacuum of an identity crisis, his past becomes substance-less, and the ideal future withers away. He felt like a dewdrop on the lotus leaf, which exists for a moment only (Tagore, 1952, p. 402). The standard, uniform, and homogenous national culture which people with nationalist zeal celebrate and the identities they uphold ardently are not free from such fallacies.

The theme of *Ghare Baire,* published in 1916, revolves around the popular uprising that exploded in the form of Swadeshi and boycott demonstrations. Despite the agenda of the protest being restricted to the promotion of indigenous goods against English goods, the activism ended up unleashing the forces of vandalism which engaged in coercion, communalism, robbery, and unchecked hooliganism. The novel explores the emotional chaos that occurs in the lives of Nikhil, his wife Bimala, and his friend Sandip against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement and how their interpersonal relationships get strained due to their conflicting perspectives on Swadeshi, nationalism, and morality. The character Nikhil happens to be a morally upright and intellectually sophisticated person who opposes Swadeshi and boycotts for their impetuosity and the social disorder they foster. Rather, Nikhil represents Tagore's ideological standings. Sandip, on the other hand, is a manipulative and narcissistic person who cunningly promotes nationalist hysteria and legitimises martyrdom, loot, and force through his demagoguery. Bimala represents ordinary people who, while choosing between moral integrity and nationalistic euphoria, get captivated by the charm of the latter, for it appeals to the emotions, numbs reason, and rejects the former for its sublime simplicity. Through Nikhil, Tagore signals that demonstrations and high-voltage melodrama do not mean true patriotism, but real patriotism exists in maintaining integrity and serving society. The difference between Sandip and Nikhil is the difference between fanaticism, belligerence, and mendacity on the one hand and rationalism, idealism, and virtuousness on the other. Tagore's home is rather a reliance on Indian ethos, while nationalism is a foreign ingredient which belongs to the world. '[T]he novel's search for the true place of home coalesces into the quest for a true form of nationalism' (Mitra, 1995, p. 248).

Bimala, despite being a principled and thoughtful woman, gets hypnotised by the magniloquence of Sandip and starts to look down on her virtuous and contemplative husband as an unmasculine person isolated in a sociopolitical environment flooded with nationalist machismo. In her misguided sense of nationalism, she even commits robbery in her home to contribute money to the swadeshi cause by compromising her ethics. She, like any misguided nationalist volunteer, starts to believe that a total dedication to the national cause is superior to

all ethical codes and that all wrongs committed towards that cause are justified. In the end, she realises the dreadfulness of her thoughts and actions. Her inner conflict is clearly visible when she says that 'The thing which seems so glorious when viewed from the heights of the country's cause, looks so muddy when seen from the bottom. One begins by getting angry, and then feels disgusted' (Tagore, 1957, p. 94). In *Ghare Baire,* Tagore discloses the falsity of nationalism and people's insane eagerness to participate in patriotically charged destructiveness rather than in positive creation. In the superficially propagated call for Swadeshi and boycott, which was mainly executed through the burning of English goods but without any equal and genuine pride in Swadeshi products, Nikhil's sincere but undecorated Swadeshi and honest utilisation of local goods appear mediocre to his wife and friends. Bimala says, 'But this dull, milk-and-watery *Swadeshi* of his never appealed to us. Rather, we had always felt ashamed of the inelegant, unfashionable furniture of his reception-rooms, especially when he had the magistrate, or any other European, as his guest' (Tagore, 1957, p. 122).

Tagore spoke against the binary of indigenous and foreign, for it promotes hostility towards the latter. The novel represents pre-modern India, that is, *home* and its readjustment with the politico-nationalist *world* (Puri, 2020, p. 159). The novel explains how manipulative leaders, under the guise of nationalism, blur the boundaries between ethical and unethical for their personal greed for power and elevate untruth above the truth. At one place, Sandip argues, '…I never hesitated to dilute ten per cent of truth with ninety per cent of untruth. And now, merely because I have ceased to belong to that party [Congress], I have not forgotten the basic fact that man's goal is not truth but success' (Tagore, 1957, p. 138). For Sandip, the truth is subjective and twistable to suit needs and circumstances. Tagore also highlighted the pretentiousness of nationalist solidarity. Those poor, whom no one cared for otherwise, started being treated as brothers and comrades in the nationalist mission. When Swadeshi enthusiasts demand that even the poor must abandon the use or sale of foreign goods, Nikhil asks them, 'Have you yet wasted so much as a glance on what was happening to them? But now you would dictate what salt they shall eat, what clothes they shall wear. Why should they put up with such tyranny…' (Tagore, 1957, pp. 131-132).

When poor Panchu tries to sell foreign-made clothes, which he had purchased with borrowed money, the coercive swadeshi enthusiasts burn his whole bale. Sandip, picking some of those ashes, told Panchu, 'These are sacred ashes. Smear yourselves with them in token of your *Swadeshi* vow' (Tagore, 1957, p. 136). The misery Panchu was subjected to shows how elite-driven nationalism and its mandate harm the poor who could not afford to be a part of

such a leisurely vendetta, as they have to prove their patriotism at the cost of personal loss. Tagore's dismissal of the treatment of the nation as a God or Goddess can be seen when Nikhil argues that I am prepared 'to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it' (Tagore, 1957, p. 26).

Ghare Baire also questions the misogyny underlying nationalism. Sandip was a patriarchal nationalist. With reference to nature, earth, and women, he says:

> WE are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute. Ever since we have come upon the Earth we have been plundering her; and the more we claimed, the more she submitted. From primeval days have we men been plucking fruits, cutting down trees, digging up the soil, killing beast, bird and fish… it has all been grabbing and grabbing and grabbing—no strong-box in Nature's store-room has been respected or left unrifled. The one delight of this Earth is to fulfil the claims of those who are men. She has been made fertile and beautiful and complete through her endless sacrifices to them… Likewise, by sheer force of our claims, we men have opened up all the latent possibilities of women. In the process of surrendering themselves to us, they have ever gained their true greatness... So for men to accept is truly to give: for women to give is truly to gain (Tagore, 1957, pp. 152-153).

When Nikhil objected to Muslims being forced to burn their stock of British goods despite them facing financial losses, both as poor people and small traders, he was labelled as unpatriotic and regressive (Das, 2016, p. 675). Tagore, through Nikhil, condemns poor people being forced to participate in strategies like bonfires and boycotts. He asserts that sentiments of boycott should stem from within rather than being imposed from outside. Any form of coercion itself is against the idea of freedom for which the whole nationalist discourse was designed. The slogan *Bande Mataram* was no less than a war cry to Tagore, signalling eventual devastation.

When Sandip leads the Swadeshi and boycott protests, creating a mixed environment of hooliganism and anarchy, Nikhil, though less successful, starts an alternative of producing and selling indigenous goods. Nikhil's ideas and acts represent Tagore's silent efforts towards village reconstruction at Sriniketan and his positive indigenousness. On the other side, Sandip represents methods of collective resistance through mass mobilisation. The novel denounces the idolisation of the nation as Durga or Jagardhatri. Sandip and his friend Harish Kundu host a puja of Mahishasurmardini Durga. They encourage militancy among Hindu youth and simultaneously alienate Muslims (Ghosh, 2020, p. 42). *Ghare Baire* represents the difficulty in choosing between truth and convenience, and morality and success. The 'self-styled cosmopolitanism of *The Home and the World* ultimately depends on the uneasy encounter

between one invested place and another, between public and private, between a conventional England and an invented 'Motherland'' (Walkowitz, 2000, as quoted in Saha, 2013, p. 17).

4.4 Tagore's Scepticism of State and Nationalism

Tagore's pessimistic perspectives on the nature of the state, nation, and nationalism were shaped by the nationalist upheavals which dominated the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. At this stage of human history, the last remaining empires of the world were collapsing, paving the way for the rise of power-seeking political communities called nation-states. In these nations, both the government and the people shared the suspicion of other nations. They were captivated by the intense sense of superiority and their extreme sentiments of hyper-nationalism aimed at developing military prowess to attack and colonise others. The age of nationalism subverted sociality and morality to reinforce nationalist narcissism and substituted humanism with ethnocentrism. This chaotic order, dominated by collective fanaticism, diminished the ideal essence of a free society and began to treat righteousness and universalism as outdated ideals and obstacles to the triumph of national glory.

Tagore was artistically primitivist, materially minimalist, philosophically spiritualist, and culturally transcendentalist, and for the same reason was distrustful of materialist modernity, rigid social structures, political institutions, and the authorisation of the state as the embodiment of truth. As nationalism is an ideology embedded in power, greed, hegemony, colonialism, collective egoism, and celebration of destruction, Tagore denounced nationalism, both Indian and European. Tagore had understood that the masculine, aggressive, and destructive nature of nationalism not only produces hate, suspicion, and negative competition between the nations, but it also destroys the international goodwill, harmony, and peace necessary for collective welfare. Tagore (2009, pp. 12-13) asserts that in the modern age, the institution of the state has garnered immense force, and the institution, which was created to promote the welfare of society and individuals, ended up enslaving them. Power is a product developed in the laboratory of politics of nations by the obliteration of humanity. The obsessed patriots, oblivious to the danger of their blind loyalty to the state, continue to venerate the dominance and celebrate consequent self-sabotage.

The modern political history of the world is primarily dominated by the unholy merger of ethnocultural identities and their political aspirations. Their flags of nationalism created disorder in all directions. From promoting majoritarianism and terrorising minorities inside the

territory, it went up to fuelling two major world wars and imperialism. This doctrinal hypnosis makes people choose force, rivalry, and bloodshed over humanity, collective good, mutual respect, peace, cooperation, and security. Tagore (2009, p. 15) asserts that '..nationalism is a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, and eating into its moral vitality'. Like an evil spirit, it radicalises people and makes them believe that a nationless society represents backwardness. Such a society cannot explore its full potential and hinders its natural growth. Hence, people's true glory and prosperity exist in sacrificing society and surrendering to the mechanistic power of the nation.

Nationalism ridicules idealism, disparages humanism, and glorifies cynicism in foreign policy. It rationalises the promotion of national interests at the cost of humanity and legitimises all forms of carnage. Tagore's ideal world is the post-nationalist and transcendentalist world.

> Tagore was a believer in an interactive, dialogic world, given to a deep sense of sympathy, generosity and mutuality, and in which nations would not be parochial, xenophobic and centripetal, or guided by mere selfishness and self-aggrandisement, but poised towards a morally and politically enlightened community of nations through the espousal of a centrifugal outlook, multilateral imagination, principal of universality and reciprocal recognitions (Quayum, 2006, p. 34).

Tagore holds that the alliance of politics and commerce has stripped man of his innate grace and gentleness. His natural innocence and compassion have been lost when nationalism and capitalism moulded the individual into a product of '..marvellous square-cut finish, savouring of gigantic manufacture, that the Creator will find it difficult to recognise it as a thing of spirit…' (Tagore, 2009, p. 11). He was sceptical of the capitalist mode of production. Science gave birth to machines, and the machines generated wealth. The wealth produced power, and the power maximised human greed. It is greed which contributed to the colonisation of native lands for the attainment of national interests. Despite Tagore's philosophical condemnation of Indian nationalism, surprisingly, his song *Jana Gana Mana* became the national anthem of India. Nussbaum (2008, p. 90) argues that this song celebrates the eternal spirit of moral righteousness, and all Indians collectively seek the victory of this principle. The anthem pursues inclusiveness and equality, and the triumph it cherishes is moral and not warlike. This characterisation portrays *Jana Gana Mana* as the contrast to *Vande Mataram*, the national song of India and top pick of Hindu right, which desires the carnage of the enemy of Hindu India and unrelenting commitment to the mother nation.

Tagore detested nationalism for its relentless desire to elevate the state as the supreme organisation by totally diminishing the existence of society. He argues that ever since the

machinery of state has evolved in its gigantic and coercive form called the nation-state, it has disrupted the existence of independent societies connected by free and fluid interrelations. Tagore distinguishes between invasions of the past and colonisations of his time. Even when wars were fought in the past to conquer new territories, the invaders, such as the Mughals, who invaded new lands, in due course assimilated into those societies, embraced their cultures, and erased the cultural difference between ruler and ruled. Rather, they enriched the existing culture with their insertions. However, in the age of nationalism, when the British colonised India, the ruler retained the racial-cultural distinction between the ruler and the ruled (Tagore, 2009, pp. 11-12). Unlike invasions of the medieval age, where assimilation was the definite end of the process, today's nationalist imperialism, if imposed from outside, fosters slavery, and if evolved from inside, encourages coercion and mechanises individuals. Tagore, like Gandhi, was suspicious of the Western political systems, which were rooted in and strived for power and executed it over those people whom they had selected for exploitation. Such frenzy of the colonisers for power not only made them deny freedom to subjected people but, moreover, dried their own fountains of freedom and love (Tagore, 2009, p. 18). Nationalism intoxicates the conscience of man with false pride and prejudices, pushes them into a trance of excesses, and fuels their illusion of progress without offering them anything of substantial value. Instead of walking towards spiritual humanity, humans, ignorant of the truths of nationalism, go deeper into the rabbit hole, losing track of right and wrong.

Tagore differentiates between the Western state and Western civilisation. While Gandhi correlated both, Tagore criticised the Western state and admired Western society for its adherence to the ideals of liberty, scientific temperament, and justice. He correlated nationalism and colonialism. Tagore (2009, p.16) asserts that governments founded on nationalism and power act like a hydraulic machine, indifferent to emotions and the human spirit, and crush all living elements into soulless bodies. Tagore (2009, pp. 14-15) asserts that in nationalist ideology, the ruler, despite possessing immense power, is suspicious of the subject. Coercion is meted out against every voice of dissent or novel thought distinct from those approved by the government. The association of the state, which emerged to protect and promote the rights and liberties of the people and create a conducive environment for the potential growth of man’s mind and body, ended up restraining them through sets of inhuman laws, bureaucratic hurdles, and state-sponsored violence. He believed that nationalist ideology promotes expansionist longing among nations, which then proceeds to colonise new land, people, and

resources. Tagore's assessment of the relationship between nationalism, colonialism, and war brings him close to Lenin, Kautsky, and Bukharin (Bagchi, 2014, p.42)

Tagore affirmed that in past societies, the state would not entirely regulate all spaces of human life. Unlike modern totalitarian states, those of the past were not centrally structured with diligent vigilance and had left ample space for the civilisation to flourish freely and naturally. Despite all their imperfections and shortcomings, such societies represented free minds, creative spirits, and social elasticity (Tagore, 2009, p. 19). The modern states are like boarding schools where, despite the high-quality services, their monotony kills the creativity and free spirit of pupils. Tagore idealised an extremely minimal state and a loosely woven texture of society, which he represented in the form of self-governing village societies. The social heterodoxy and nonchalant nature of society, which promotes fluidity in the correlation between individuals, are frequently seen as obstacles to stringent administration by nation-states. It intends regularity, conformity, patterns, structures, and formats for every sphere of socio-political life for horizontal and vertical administration, leaving no space for social flexibility. Such a form of control destroys the humanness of individuals and makes them appear as animals in husbandry. Tagore believed that individuals who celebrate nationalist collectivism and willingly surrender to the power of the state, volunteer for '..trimming of their minds and clipping of their freedom by their government…. wielding of them into one uniform mass according to its own recipe' (Tagore, 2009, p. 20). He asserted that governance in earlier centuries was like a handloom product, containing the magic of human touch and harmonious with the music of life. The present organised governance by the nation is like a power-loom, where the production is precise, advanced, and yet lifeless and monotonous (Tagore, 2009, p. 16).

Tagore stated that despite nationalism encouraging people to take a pledge of loyalty, promote comradeship, and make people rejoice in flags, hymns, prayers, and patriotic songs, the fact remains that nationalism is the greatest danger to a community (Tagore, 2009, p. 22). People, in their natural state, are chivalrous and thoughtful, but when they intoxicate themselves with the spirit of nationalism, they lose their reason and senses. They engage in hero worship and glorify violence, war, and devastation, making vengeance and arrogance their ideal values. Morality gets twisted, rationality gets hampered, and victory sidelines truth. Such a collective idolisation of crude force provides people with sinister pleasures, which parches their humanness, empathy, and conscience and leaves them craving for more viciousness in the name of national pride. When the whole community amalgamates in one direction, turning a

blind eye to the higher purpose and norms of humanity, they give birth to mob mentality and hooliganism. Tagore (2009, p. 26) writes that when the thinking of the masses is numbed, and their will is killed, leading to the mechanisation of the mind and dehumanisation of the soul, an absurd personality emerges, which is completely deviated from the truth and is equally brutal.

Tagore's dread of nationalism was based on the simple proposition that when self-interests, wealth, and power become the sole objective of every nation on the planet, the world would turn into a battleground where each nation must eliminate the others to survive, similar to the law of the jungle. Thus, either become a coloniser by suspending every string attached to the ideals of humanity or become a colonised community. Certainly, many nations would not want to be a party to this unending combat, but the madness of a few in the name of national glory would push all into this deadly cycle of predator and prey. Tagore believed that society is the end in itself and has no ulterior purpose to attain power. Man is the centre of thought and actions and is not a means to the ends of society when it turns into a nation (Catlin, 1961, p. 623). In this way, Tagore not only delegitimises the concept of national personality but also denounces populism that venerates the nation.

Advocating the foreignness of the idea of the nation to India, Tagore asserted that there is no vernacular Indian term equivalent to the nation (Dasthakur, 2016, p. 414). Unlike Indian nationalists who were always up for a boycott of everything that is European, Tagore was critical only of nationalism, which was a product of European politics, but he cherished all the noble things which the East could learn from the West. His damnation of nationalism pushed some Indian revolutionaries to hatch an unsuccessful conspiracy to assassinate him during his visit to the US (Dutta and Robinson, 1997, as cited in Munshi, 2011, p. 299). Tagore believed that true freedom exists in a society where each man is consciously free to shape his destiny, and coercion is not used to curtail those ways of life which are found different by the mainstream imagination.

4.5 Assessment of Tagore's Perception of Nationalism

Tagore's ideas on nationalism have been subject to mixed reactions from scholars and critics alike. Several Western contemporaries of Tagore challenged his condemnation of nationalist ideology as the most dangerous episode of human history. Georg Lukacs called Tagore an insignificant figure preaching an archaic, outdated, and useless philosophy of the Gita and the

Upanishads. D. H. Lawrence not only called Tagore a horrible decadent preaching pre-modern barbarism, but in a racial tone, asserted that Western wisdom and intelligence are far greater than Eastern in every sense (Desai, 1985 & Kripalani, 1962, as cited in Quayum, 2006, p. 35). Nationalism basically constitutes various forms, such as ethnic nationalism, cultural nationalism, racial nationalism, militant nationalism, civic nationalism, secular nationalism, etc. Besides these, there are extreme right-wing ideologies such as Fascism and Nazism. Tagore did not distinguish between the various forms of nationalism and their respective merits and demerits (Mehta, 2019, p. 263). Tagore had thoroughly analysed the ethnolinguistic nationalism that emerged mainly in 19th-century Europe. He rightly assessed the crude ambitions of nationalism and the havoc it brings upon humankind by imprisoning people in a never-ending cycle of false pride and self-destruction. This fixed conviction prevented him from distinguishing between the coloniser's nationalism and the nationalism of the colonised, i.e. Indian nationalism.

Tagore believed that Indian nationalism is as threatening as European nationalism. He feared that Indian nationalism would destroy India's cultural diversity and replace regional, religious, and linguistic plurality with centralised homogeneity, which would be then protected by the police state, turning humans into soulless creatures. Although his analyses were logically convincing, he went too far in condemning Indian nationalism, which emerged as an outcome of the anti-colonial struggle. Tagore did not understand that Indian nationalism was not necessarily a force of hatred and violence which would break social cohesion, but a force of voluntary love and unity which aimed to unite natives of diverse backgrounds through the sacred fraternity. It was not a spirit of collective selfishness but a phenomenon which united Indians for a higher cause by making them rise above their selfishness (Mehta, 2019, p. 263). Indian nationalism did not ascribe to the policy of expansionism and colonisation but to political freedom and individual liberation. It did not desire national aloofness or narrow-mindedness but dreamed of world union and humanism. Tagore did not realise that even consciousness of one's distinctive identity as a community or an upsurge against colonial rule equals nationalism (Mehta, 2019, p. 263).

While Tagore believed that nationalism is necessarily anti-internationalism, his contemporaries like Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo viewed nationalism as a process of reawakening the spirit of India. It is a forerunner of the world union, and India needs to play a significant role in it (Mehta, 2019, p. 263). Tagore saw nationalism as a product of human selfishness. However, in the case of India, it is indeed nationalism which prompted the masses

to rise above their petty interests for the collective good. While Tagore claimed nationalism is a curse, Sen (2008, p. 44) argues that nationalism can be a boon or a curse, depending on its employment. When identities like religion, caste, ethnicity, and language promote hostilities and sectarianism, which can divide a country, nationalism as a distinct identity helps to unify the country. Another shortcoming of Tagore's interpretation of nationalism is that he equated nationalism with conquering force, militarism, and fascism, which may not always be true. He associated nationalism with colonialism and capitalism as two sides of the same coin, not acknowledging that nationalism could be an upsurge against colonialism to establish political democracy and against capitalism to establish socialism or economic democracy.

Tagore underestimated the role of science and its contribution to establishing a culture of rationalism when he referred to it as a vulture. Similarly, Tagore underestimated the role of machines and heavy industries in liberating man from hardship and poverty and in contributing to his leisure, by mistaking it for competitive commercialism (Catlin, 1961, p. 624). Tagore associated commercialism with imperialism and hence built distrust towards machines and industries. Gunnar Myrdal observed that though the utopia of a simple village lifestyle and cottage industries could be idealistic, in the real world, where people suffer from starvation and lack of supplies, machinery and equipment would play a commendable part in human alleviation (Catlin, 1961, p. 625).

4.6 Tagore's Philosophy of Holistic Education: An Experiment at Santiniketan

In 1863, Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, purchased a large piece of land in Bhubandanga village to establish a cultural-educational centre or *ashram,* which he named Santiniketan (abode of peace). Eventually, the entire area, including the nearby settlements, came to be known as Santiniketan. Debendranath, a follower and active member of the Brahmo Samaj, used this place to preach the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj. In 1901, Rabindranath established a small school on this campus named Brahmacharyaashrama or Ashram Vidhyalaya. It was renamed as Patha Bhavana in 1925. In 1921, Tagore extended his efforts in spreading education by establishing Visva Bharati University on this campus. Tagore dreamed of a unique scheme of education which would be different from and beyond the state-sponsored uniform education imparted to create labourers for industrial society. He established Visva Bharati to serve as a synthesis of Eastern and Western knowledge. The school, which started with a mere five students, eventually became the base of cultural, intellectual, and educational

activities, attracting students and teachers from different parts of India and the world. In a nearby area of Surul, which eventually became popular as Sriniketan, Tagore started his programme of village reconstruction based on the principles of Swadeshi Samaj to develop a model of an ideal village with a self-governing community. Chakrabarty (2021, p. 138) states that Tagore had a strong conviction that if such a model village is developed and functions successfully, the same prototype should be replicated in other parts of India. Both these centres, i.e. Santiniketan and Sriniketan, were interconnected and shared material as well as human resources. In Santiniketan, he established the Siksha Satra school in 1924 but later shifted it to Sriniketan in 1927 to provide informal education to poor children. In 1936, an organisation called the Lok-Siksha Samsad was established to spread non-formal education among those who did not have access to regular education. It was one of the earliest types of open-distance learning systems in India and the world. In 1937, Siksha Charcha was established to train village schoolteachers (Das, 2017, p. 57; Pal & Bairagya, 2015, pp. 2100-2101).

The core objective behind the establishment of Visva Bharati was to impart creative, thought-provoking, character-building, artistic, aesthetic, humanistic, and holistic education by employing highly unconventional and innovative pedagogy. O' Connell (2020, p. 95) argues that in the age of divisive nationalism, Visva Bharati attempted to bring people of diverse civilizational and cultural backgrounds to live and learn together on the basis of human solidarity by surpassing the mental and physical borders of nations. Tagore's conception of education was inspired by the ideals of romanticism, enlightenment, transcendentalism, and free learning. He detested the highly formalised, routinised, monotonous, and bookish pedagogy followed in English schools, where the student was expected to learn within the four walls of the classroom, and the teachers were treated as the only source of wisdom, with no scope for self-learning and learning through nature. He asserted that a closed mode of teaching-learning would sterile students' reasoning power and demoralise them by associating learning with boredom (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 243-244). Tagore believed that students absorb knowledge better when taught in the outer environment and in the vicinity of nature than in closed classrooms relying only on a handful of textbooks. He wanted to create a flexible blend of the ancient Indian *Gurukul* system and modern scientific-methodological teaching. *Tapoban, Ashram, Tapashya*, *Sangam*, etc. were the words which defined his educational philosophy (Acharya, 1997, p. 603). While English schools represented technical and professional knowledge, the Gurukul system represented holistic and man-making education necessary for developing all faculties of students. In either case, the Gurukul system made more

sense to him than the other. O'Connell (2011, p. 18) states that Tagore's model of education was inspired by ancient Buddhist learning centres at Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila. His approach to education inspired his friend Leonard Elmhirst to establish Dartington Hall Trust in England and a school at Dartington (Sen, 2006, p. 93).

Tagore found the education imparted by the English government insufficient, both in terms of knowledge development and the impartation of professional skills. Like his contemporaries, he admitted that Western education asserts that Indian civilisation lacks originality in its intellect and knowledge system and, hence, Indians are unfit for self-rule, which creates an inferiority complex among Indians. They also arrogantly claim it as the 'white man's burden' to civilise the East. Tagore, who was aware of India's rich heritage of knowledge, was not ready to accept such ill-informed accusations (Tagore, 2009, pp. 17-18). Whether it is his political philosophy or his social conceptions, he always chose imagination over mere reason, creation over construction, and natural over artificial (Soares, 1970 as cited in Quayum, 2006, p. 38).

Tagore has put the utmost emphasis on education as a scheme for man-making. Though under Macaulay's English Education Act of 1835, Western English education was prioritised, leading to the advent of state-sponsored education in India, Tagore was sceptical about its success as he found it lacking the holistic approach necessary to remove deficiencies in human nature or endorse creativity. He found it harmful to the intellectual growth of the child (Ghosh, 2015, pp. 401-402). While this era also included leaders like Tilak, who believed that the scheme of education should be completely Indic in nature, infused with revivalism, nationalism, and learning of *shastras* to ignite the spirit of cultural pride and patriotism among youth, as Western education produces a sense of inferiority among masses, Tagore had no intentions of associating education with any political goal. Rather, education should be liberated from all forms of polarisations and associations, as true wisdom strives in detachment. For Tagore, education should be '..a synthetic cohabitation and assimilation of the vernacular and the foreign' (Ghosh, 2015, p. 402).

Tagore found modern education mechanistic, arid, and apathetic, where formalism kills the inner creativity of children by treating the young souls as captives in the cage called a classroom, where the ability to memorise and not creativity is considered for appraisal (Ghosh, 2015, p. 402). He himself never had a continuous schooling and left it midway. Art, dance, drama, music, theatre, crafts, fine arts, literature, and other co-curricular activities were part of

the dynamic curriculum of Santiniketan (Lal, 1984, p. 35). His ideas on child education were thematically similar to the ideas of J. J. Rousseau in *Emile* and the ideas of Leo Tolstoy. He believed that young minds are full of curiosity and yet unorganised and, hence, should be taught in an informal way.

> Both Tagore and Tolstoy combined experimentalism and acquisition of experience in the working out of aesthetic education in their schools: a sensitive inquiry into an examination of the demands of the child in processes of learning and emotional and intellectual maturity (Ghosh, 2015, p. 405)

Tagore was inevitably futuristic and progressive in his approach to child education. While India's National Education Policy - 2020 stresses holistic, inclusive, and creative education, that to be beyond formal impartation of knowledge through textbook lessons and recitation, Tagore reflected on this a century ago. He was keen on transforming children and fostering civility and culture among them, rather than limiting them to reciting syllabi for clearing exams and gaining employment. He was even unhappy when the practice of examinations was introduced at Santiniketan (Acharya, 1997, p. 603).

Tagore's philosophy of education was based on his essential conviction that knowledge can occur from any direction and from any land, and hence, an individual should not close the doors of his mind against any particular path of knowledge based on his inbuilt preconceptions. His ideal student discards the barren leaves of dry and dormant knowledge and turns to nature with an open heart and mind to discover the wisdom of life. Strickland-Anderson (1924, p. 464) asserts that in Tagore's aesthetic education, the open spaces of greenery, tall trees and groves, cold mornings and warm evenings, silver moonlight and chilled breezes, rains and winters were nothing less than living teachers. In Santiniketan, they would celebrate seasonal festivals such as the Rain Festival and tree plantation, Vasant Panchami, etc. Tagore called the typical education parrot training. The classrooms are like cages, and the students are like birds who can perfectly imitate but cannot creatively imagine (Lal, 1984, p. 33). Almost a century before Richard Louv published his acclaimed book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* in 2005, which popularised the concept of nature-based education in the United States and long before modern neuroscience re-discovered the vitality of contact with nature for the healthy development of children, Tagore utilised the nature-surrounded, nature-based, and nature-centric learning at Santiniketan (Aves, 2025).

Tagore's ideals of humanism, social sympathy, and the symbiotic relationship of man with nature are rightly represented in his philosophy of aesthetic education. He asserted,

> We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fulness [sic] by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days… (Lal, 1984, p. 34).

Tagore distinguished between ritualism and spirituality. In his school, Sanskrit shlokas, Vedas, and Upanishads were taught as part of a larger scheme of education. However, religious dogmas were prohibited on the premises (Lal, 1984, pp. 35-36).

Tagore followed Socratic pedagogy at Santiniketan. Instead of monotonous lecturing, a teacher would teach by posing questions. Students were engaged in planning the schedule of the day, and classes were primarily held outdoors in the natural surroundings (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 155). The aim of the education was to generate curiosity, creativity, and admiration for art and beauty among students and free them from traditional codes of taboos strongly upheld by society through cultural conservatism. The aim was to develop a society where minds would be free from irrational taboos, prejudicial morality, and repetitiveness. To widen the intellectual horizon of the students, classics were taught in his school. Not English, but Bengali was the language of instructions. Teachers from various countries came to teach and learn at Visva Bharati, which attempted to secure a fusion of indigenous as well as foreign sources of knowledge (Sen, 2006, pp. 114-115). His emphasis on Bengali as a language of instruction should not be interpreted as his dislike for the English language. Rather, he mentioned that learning English has provided Indians with access to an encyclopaedia of great poems (Sen, 2006, p. 119). He considered Shakespeare, Milton, and Byron as his passionate inspiration (Shahane, 1963, p. 55).

4.7 Reconstructing an Ideal Village: An Experiment at Sriniketan

At the age of 28, when his father entrusted him with the task of managing the affairs of the hereditary zamindari, Tagore came in direct contact with rural life and the condition of peasants engulfed in ignorance, poverty, superstitions, and vulnerability. In 1938, at Sriniketan in Surul, Tagore asserted that he was restless and heartbroken when he realised that while he was living a privileged life as a member of a landlord family, the peasants working in their fields were living in destitution (Ganguly, 2014, p. 139). It was the socioeconomic marginalisation and chronic vulnerability of the villagers which moved Tagore to develop a programme for

integrated development. Tagore's vision of the ideal India comprised self-reliant villages functioning through cooperation and consistency for sustainable development and collective welfare. He treated education, skill-building, and community initiatives as means to make villagers self-dependent. At the time when the nationalists were complaining that the English government was not performing the welfare role and were investing their energy in blaming the government for the sorry state of villagers, Tagore proposed that instead of relying on the state to carry out works of community development, it is villagers, in their conventional form of self-confidence and self-dependency, who should decide the nature of works necessary for village development and perform it themselves. He referred to this approach as *Atmashakti* (Gohain, 2011, p. 24).

Tagore prioritised social reconstruction over political decolonisation and argued that India is a civilizational society and not a nation in the European sense. Our problems are not political but social in nature (Tagore, 2009, p. 53). In this process of village reconstruction, villagers would be associated with each other with the affiliation of kinship and neighbourliness for the conduct of socio-economic activities. He regarded this socioeconomic setup as *swadeshi samaj* founded on *atmashakti* or self-reliance, which would strengthen the moral and material integrity of society. He developed this vision as a blueprint in the wake of the Swadeshi movement, which was unfortunately becoming entirely political and nation-centric with no intentions or strategies for social reconstruction. Tagore proposed that the *Bhadralok*, instead of confining themselves to the bureaucratic-intellectual style of working, should understand and exercise engagements by looking at the samaj from the prism of ordinary people (Thakur, 1986, as cited in Ganguly, 2014, p. 140). While nationalists' swadeshi was concentrated on political reformation and involved negative mechanisms such as the burning of foreign goods, Tagore's swadeshi samaj was occupied with community revitalisation and engaged in constructive works. For the former, the swaraj specifically meant national sovereignty. But for Tagore, swaraj meant self-governing local communities. While Tilak's swaraj was politically oriented and had a nationalist overtone, Tagore's swaraj stood for socio-spiritual awakening.

Tagore's perception of India was more social and humanistic than political. While the nationalists were occupied with nationalism within the context of power and bureaucratic and political reforms, Tagore's conception of *Bharatvarsh* was rooted in rural-traditional society, its fluid nature, integral scheme of human emancipation inspired by transcendentalism, upliftment of peasants and women, and spiritual and holistic growth of society demonstrating free-spirit, scientific temperament, humanist rationalism, and artistic individualism. Being a

society-centric civilisation, Indians must invest their efforts in rebuilding the ideal India rather than remaining dependent on the state for the same. Such a practice would not only reduce our over-dependence on the state machinery but would also provide us opportunities to live a communitarian life. Holding a sceptical view of the state as a mechanical body, Tagore feared that such an institution, instead of positively contributing to the construction of society, might cause its destruction. Chakrabarty (2021, p. 142) states Tagore belief that when society ceases to perform its role and imposes it on the political body to handle the developmental administration, the result is always disastrous, leading the country into ignorance, poverty, and diseases. He had profound confidence in the collaborative behaviour of humans towards the collective good. To implement his ideas, Tagore experimented with village rejuvenation activities in Sriniketan and nearby areas.

Sriniketan experiment of Tagore was a composite set of activities including agriculture, education, health, cottage industries, and local market, aimed at creating a cluster of self-reliant villages wherein each village would have its peculiar mechanisms to eradicate poverty, ignorance, and diseases, promote organic farming and collective socio-cultural life, develop corresponding teaching-learning, and mutual efforts for sustainable livelihood (Mukherjee, 2020, p. 124). Similar to Tagore's ideas, the modern-day MGNREGA scheme implemented by the Indian government also focuses on the sustainable utilisation of local resources with the involvement of local bodies and rural labourers, mainly consisting of farmers. Tagore believed that the solutions to local problems should emerge from within rather than being imposed from outside. The objective was to make villagers self-sufficient by capacity building in terms of promoting rational thinking, developing basic infrastructure and cottage industries, utilising locally available resources, ensuring equal participation in decision-making (direct democracy), and empowering women. Rather than helping them monetarily, which could never last long, the development of their skills was his purpose (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 133). When the leaders of the national movement were occupied with attaining political independence, Tagore was formulating his vision of rural India, as to him, India should not emerge as a replica of the Western political economy after its decolonisation.

Tagore established the Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IRR) in 1922 at Sriniketan and invited Leonard Elmhirst to be its first director. Elmhirst was trained in Agriculture at Cornell University in the United States. He used his knowledge to teach farmers various methods to increase agricultural production, such as paddy and vegetables, to consume as well as sell and generate income (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 139). To promote sustainable livelihood

among villagers, Tagore worked to provide locals with access to the market for homegrown handicrafts. *Melas*, market days, and festival days were organised to help people sell their handicrafts and products of cottage industries established in Sriniketan. IRR constituted the Education Department, the Agriculture Department, and the Village Welfare Department. The Agriculture Department would conduct experiments to check if new harvests could be raised. Demonstrations of the same were conducted for villagers and promoted animal husbandry (Das, 2017, pp. 57-58).

The Swadeshi Samaj (1904) and the Cooperative Principle (1928) of Tagore were the blueprints for his village reconstruction programme. While the latter explains the policy to bring together people for a common cause, the former presents a model of rural development (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 130). The Sriniketan initiative was undertaken by Tagore because, firstly, the villagers were deeply affected by hereditary poverty. Secondly, the government and the newly emerged *Bhadralok* were indifferent to their cause. Lastly, despite the caste-based differences, they were all extremely poor people, and the caste biases were preventing them from uniting to formulate a solution for their upliftment (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 129). In Patisar and the surrounding areas, Tagore encouraged villagers to form a political body called Hitaishi Sabha for self-governance. It was functionally similar to modern-day village panchayats with elected members. Using the taxes paid by villagers, the Sabha would perform functions like maintaining schools, maintaining dispensaries, building roads, re-excavating tanks, filling up stagnant pools, and other welfare works. Tagore also encouraged villagers to settle their disputes by arbitration through village judiciary managed by local bodies rather than going to government courts (Tagore, 2023, pp. 53-54). Hitaishi Sabha was a central council, and the headmen of each vibhaga (zone of estate) were its members.

Like Gandhi and later Lohia, Tagore discarded the use of large-scale machinery in agriculture (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 141). He, however, supported the use of small machines as they do not replace human labour and do not cause mass unemployment. Tagore used the term 'swadeshi samaj' in two contexts. It means a self-reliant village community as well as a civil society, which would have active members working for the socio-economic reconstruction of society by utilising indigenous and modern modes of knowledge. Protecting the environment, water bodies, village art, local culture, etc., were the duties of the villagers. He also mentioned certain principles to be seriously followed by Samaj members for the success of holistic development. These principles were mentioned in the Village Reconstruction Charter released in 1906. Some of its core principles include: 1. Members of the samaj should not crave the help

of the government to resolve social issues. 2. No one should voluntarily use foreign goods and clothes. 3. Communication should be carried out in the Bengali language instead of English unless it is inevitable. 4. At gatherings and functions, the British dress code, British food, British music, wine, and British people should be avoided. 5. Till Swadeshi schools are established, students should be sent to schools run by Indians. 6. In case of any dispute between people, instead of approaching the English judiciary, it had to be resolved with the measures of arbitration set by Samaj. 7. Goods should be purchased from Swadeshi shops. 8. Housewives to be trained in local trade. 9. Communal harmony to be maintained and the message of all religions to be taught in schools (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 151; Das, 2017, p. 57).

To protect the small farmers trapped in the vicious cycle of borrowing agricultural loans from moneylenders at a higher rate of interest and selling their crops to them at cheaper rates in case of failed seasons or failure to timely repay the loan amount, Tagore, with his associates, started a Patisar Krishi Bank in 1906 to lend money to farmers at lower interest rates compared to those imposed by moneylenders or *mahajans*. However, it must be remembered that this was not a cooperative Bank but a Zamindari bank (Ganguly, 2014, p. 139). A lump sum amount from the Nobel Prize Fund, which he received in 1913, was invested in this bank for the welfare of peasants. Such efforts not only highlight his concern for the peasant class but also show his effort at decolonisation from internal exploitation. Both Gandhi and Tagore imagined the idea of self-dependent villages as the future of India. While Gandhi developed a conception of village republics, Tagore conceptualised the idea of swadeshi samaj.

Some of the core objectives of the Swadeshi Samaj included: improving agriculture by constructing granaries for storing grains. Reviving indigenous handicrafts to promote additional sources of income for villagers. Promoting hygiene among people and providing them access to clean water for consumption. To strengthen health by appointing a medical practitioner in the village. Promoting awareness among people regarding measures to follow in case of an outbreak of diseases like cholera and malaria. Creating a chain of people for a smooth flow of information and developing strategies for the success of different initiatives. Constructing gymnasiums, playgrounds, and indigenous schools like Shiksha Satra. To have a system to conduct a census and retain a database of different categories like birthrate, death rate, number of people affected by Malaria, gender ratio, etc. (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 153-155).

The significance of the Sriniketan project lies in its progressive vision, which is relevant even today. It tried to make women economically self-dependent and promoted the idea of

gender equality. The cottage industries founded there made a perfect merger of technology and traditional handicrafts. By attempting to scientifically organise agriculture and animal husbandry, he highlighted the message of employment and sustainable development. In today's India, where the majority of the population is moving to urban areas in search of employment, semi-technologically advanced agriculture is a viable method for generating employment as well as increasing the supply of grains. The term entrepreneurship is gaining wide attention in 21st-century India; however, Tagore attempted to realise it a century ago in Sriniketan (Das, 2017, pp. 58-60).

In the sphere of nationalism, national identities, freedom, gender, caste, class, Swadeshi, Swaraj, and anti-colonial techniques, Tagore held views and rationale distinct from those of Tilak and his colleagues in Bengal, including Bipin Chandra Pal and Sri Aurobindo. Unlike the conservative section of leaders, Tagore held a positive and progressive ideological stand towards women. He stressed on autonomous self-development of women based on the principle of *atmasakti*. His musical play *Mayar Khela* (1888) provided women with a new platform in the field of art, usually dominated by the male section of society (Purkayastha, 2017, p. 71). One can find in his works a dynamic and competent characterisation of women, i.e. *Chaar Adhyay, Gora,* and *Ghare-Baire*. Lago (1977, p. 104) asserts that Tagore's description of women in his novels and short stories was so accurate in social and psychological details that it makes the reader cry in sympathy. He presented their struggle to prove themselves as unique personalities in their own right. Tagore also held that it is the nature of India to practice social accommodation, and soon, spiritual human unity would form when the walls of caste and racial prejudices would collapse to dust. He condemned the caste system, supported the emancipation of untouchables and women, defended widow remarriage, advocated gender equality, and practised social egalitarianism at Santiniketan and Sriniketan (Dhar, 1973, p. 150).

4.8 Alternative Vision of Tagore: Humanist Universalism and Cosmopolitan Patriotism

Universalism is a philosophy and utopia composed of post-colonial critique of imperialism, masculine nationalism, and Eurocentrism. Universalism as a cross-cultural worldview suggests that 'certain fundamental attributes/attitudes of cognitive, emotive, and ethical expressions (among others) hold true for all people and societies' (Roy, 2015, p. 178). The philosophy of universalism advocates the ideals of human equality, transnational solidarity, universal

citizenship, and respect as well as inclusiveness towards cultural diversity. Hence, universal humanism as a liberal ideology and post-modern philosophy asserts that both domestic and international politics and policy formulation should be shaped by the ideals of humanism, and the collective welfare of humanity, both in the material and spiritual sense, should be the anticipated outcome of such initiatives. Rabindranath Tagore was the greatest exponent of universal humanism and cosmopolitan India, whose ideas not only created a new roadmap for India's foreign and domestic policy but also raised serious questions regarding India's nationalist sectarianism and ethnocultural supremacy. His universalism was an antidote to nationalist parochialism, burgeoning inside and outside India. The entire corpus of his works champions the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Universalism demands recognition, reception, and celebration of international, national, and local cultural plurality and defies the elevation of certain cultures and practices as global standards against others. It denounces the colonial pursuit of modernity, which systematically erases indigenous identities and epistemologies to replace them with the imposition of a Eurocentric cultural framework. Tagore's universalism envisioned the formation of a cross-cultural, postmodern, and egalitarian world order which should pursue political independence of all homelands, unhindered communication and social transactions between individuals and communities, and the development of humanity as a world religion. His main disagreement with swadeshi was also over its sectarian outlook, which was instilling hate for anything that was foreign by accusing it as detrimental to Indic culture. He asserted that the Indian nationalist ideology would make people more ethnocentric and regressive than making them truly universalist, which he saw as the true form of independence. A true swaraj would 'be achieved through a non-coercive identification with universal human ideals and aspirations…' (Roy, 2015, p. 183). Tagore's faith in universal citizenship, global family, transborder reciprocity, and cross-cultural connections persuaded him to criticise nationalist ethnocentrism through his literature. His *Gora* and *Ghare Baire* are timeless classics which not only expose the futility and hazardousness of nationalist exultations but also yearn for a cosmopolitan mentality. Jahan (2005, p. 62) asserts that *Gora* depicts Tagore's faith in diverse and humanist nationalism, and it demands an inclusive attitude on the part of Indian nationalism and Indians. *Gora* rejects colonial rule as well as the ideational binary cultivated by Indian nationalist discourse. Tagore's vision of collaborative existence has been vividly expressed in his educational philosophy. Martha Nussbaum argues that Tagore's humanist and cosmopolitan ideals, which he practised through his educational endeavours, should be

promoted in today's schools and universities. The same shall shape the policy formulations of the democracies (Datta, 2018, p. 415).

The world realised the relevance of Tagore's universalism when it experienced the chaos caused by nationalist arrogance in the form of the two world wars, both in terms of the destruction of man and material resources. It pushed scholars and thinkers to relook into the space of universalism to ensure peace and security. Tagore had immense faith in the spiritual greatness of Asia, which he considered an antidote to Western materialism (Gvili, 2018, p. 184). Transnationalism represents the free flow and exchange of ideas, cultures, and people across national borders, which often combat the sectarian philosophy of nation-states and results in the overlapping of identities and loyalties. Thus, transnationalism is the means to universalism. Tagore's transnationalism is embodied in his conceptualisation of Visva-Bharati, which envisions India in the whole world and the whole world in India. The motto of Visva-Bharati University has been *Yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam* (Where the world makes a home in a single nest). It is the crossroad of ideas across the world and where home and the world intersect in perfect harmony (Datta, 2018, pp. 419-420). Tagore, as the champion of cosmopolitan India, argues that to develop proximity between diverse cultural groups, the state needs to follow the policy of multiculturalism, and the existing institutions of the state need to be reformed to accommodate the change. The cosmopolitan India must engage in dialogue with the world and pursue reciprocal relations with the West. By gifting its Indic wisdom to the world and welcoming foreign intellectual and cultural traditions, India will enrich its culture rather than destroy it. The key element of Tagore's universalism is that it separates political from social, as the cultural borders do not amalgamate with national borders. Cosmopolitanism as an ideological commitment stands alongside universalism as both adore global fraternity and the union of people over the union of nations. Martha Nussbaum (as cited in Roy, 2015, p.180) states that in cosmopolitanism, individuals' primary loyalty and allegiance should be to the global family or world community rather than to their nation.

Tagore's universal humanism, social justice, and cosmopolitan inclusiveness were shaped by his early influences. He vehemently admired the social reforms initiated by Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar towards the education of the masses, widow remarriage, challenging inhibitive social practices, and the wholesome rejuvenation of Bengali society. He admired the rationalism of Raja Rammohan Roy towards religion and his progressive interpretation of ancient texts. Roy emphasised building cooperation between individuals based on universal humanism and monism and promoting global unison of free people (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp.

34-39). Tagore emerged as a liberal culturalist, who was nationally global and globally national. As a progressive thinker, he endeavoured to cultivate friendship and comradeship between people of the world, transcending the borders of politics and geography.

As a believer of *Advaita*, he asserted cosmic oneness. Tagore believed that the complete man is vertically and horizontally connected with other humans as well as with the past, present, and future. Humans should go beyond the confines of their voluntary isolation and self-centrism. They should form a harmonious relationship with nature and surroundings rather than seeking to conquer it (Bagchi, 2014, p. 40). Tagore condemned colonialism, which he considered an obstacle to universal humanism. He criticised the outlook held by Indian nationalists, which pushed them to reject things that were foreign in the wake of Swadeshi. His poem *Let My Country Awake* embodies his universal message of freedom and humanism to India. Here, the freedom is not limited by a narrow definition of political freedom of the country, but the liberation of mind and soul, which have been imprisoned by petty national, religious, and casteist supremacies. In that country, the mind will be free from fear, knowledge will flow freely, reason will guide actions, and truth will be upheld. Tagore believes that in contemporary times, the world has grown interdependent, where the happiness of a nation exists in the welfare and happiness of all, and the destruction of all exists in the destructiveness of one. We must choose between competition and cooperation (Tagore, 2009, p. 55). Acknowledging the spiritual heritage of India, Tagore asserted that India and those nations which can shape this new world order through spirituality and reconciliation must take the lead. He saw it as India's moral duty to unite all communities and races of the world (Quayum, 2024, p. 15). Tagore's perception of the existing world order, full of chaos and selfish instincts of the nation, is similar to Thomas Hobbes's description of the State of Nature. Tagore states that the West needs to understand its real mission of contributing to global prosperity, peace, and fraternity rather than being a curse to humanity by going blind under material opulence. Its salvation exists in helping poor and ignorant nations and freeing itself from the tyranny of all forms (Tagore, 2009, p. 59).

Tagore's post-nationalist age is also a post-modern age, which would look at the pre-modern for philosophical insights. Like other romantic poets, he moved from reason and logic to imagination and intuition, from sophisticated to primitive, from modern to medieval, and from artificial to natural ways of expression. From the hard actualities of life, he moved in search of the mysterious and the divine (Shahane, 1963, p. 56). Tagore's universalism, transcendentalism, and romanticism represent his sophistication and religion of humanity. He

was truly a product of the Bengali Renaissance, Eastern mysticism, and European romanticism. Both Tagore and Tilak were inspired by Western and Indian philosophies, but they ended up pursuing and reaching distinct paths and virtues of public life. During his conversation with Albert Einstein, he asserted that 'This world is a human world, and the Universe is in harmony with Man, the eternal' (Goswamy, as quoted in Moitra, 2019, p. 94). In this way, he builds a cosmic unity between the universe, mortal humans, and eternal man. Shahane (1963, p. 59) states that Alcott and other American transcendentalists employed the terminology of 'Personalism' to highlight that the supreme reality of the universe is a divine person who is the creator and sustainer of the world. Tagore, referring to the Isha Upanishad, stated that everything in this universe moves by the will of the omnipotent almighty.

Tagore's utopia was highly influenced by 18th and 19th-century romanticism and transcendentalism, which eulogised post-industrial society, environmentalism, agrarian culture, simple living, and nature as the true source of wisdom. He was a postmodernist, post-nationalist, and transcendentalist thinker, whose ideal world exists far beyond the bigotry of nationalism and the materialistic greed of capitalism, which glorifies political totalitarianism. He insisted on a lifestyle in symphony with nature, art, and spirituality. He abhorred the stringently organised pattern of life rooted in routineness and repetitiveness, which slaughters the wide range of alternatives available to humans to live a meaningful life full of curiosities and creativity. The following lines of his poem from *Gitanjali* represent this message.

> Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
> Where words come out from the depth of truth;
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
> Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action— Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

In his famous work, *Rakta Karabi* or Red Oleanders (1925), Tagore loathed capitalism and industrial materialism and raised serious questions regarding the dehumanising impact of modern civilisation. In a silent city named Yaksha Puri, the king enslaves his subjects by

making them work tirelessly like machines in gold mines to extract gold for him. The story criticises the excessive production under capitalism, which exploits labourers and concentrates wealth in a few hands. It allusively refers to the British colonial regime in India, which exploited the Indians for the maximisation of the wealth of Great Britain and repressed every voice of dissent. The story represents the over-engagement of state machinery in the lives of people, which kills their natural chivalry and reduces them to a mere robotic existence. The story blames materialism for fostering absurdity and existential crisis in the lives of individuals (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 71-73). The oppressive system ends with its fall when Nandini unites workers to challenge the regime. *Rakta Karabi* emphasises overcoming 'self-imprisonment, self-deprivation, and self-isolation' (Banerjee, 2010, p. 134).

In his work *Muktadhara* or The Free Current (1922), Tagore tells the story of the king of Chitrakut, who constructs a dam and blocks the current of the waterfall, causing distress for people living in the lands beyond. The dam symbolises the authoritarianism which imprisons people and desiccates the natural spirit of freedom. The birds abandoning the area signify humanity and happiness deserting society. Finally, a non-violent activist, Dhananjoy Boiragi, unites people who collectively destroy the dam, which represents freedom from oppression and freedom from technological dominance (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 75-76). Tagore was inspired by Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* (1889), where he argues that debasement in modern civilisation is the result of the lack of importance given to the moral and emotional dimensions of humankind (Chakrabarty, 2021, pp. 115-116). Similar ideas are also expressed by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.

One of the major differences in the ideas of Tagore in comparison to cultural nationalists is that while the latter stressed on ancient Indian figures and literature to avail primordiality to an emerging nation, Tagore was interested in medieval mystics, poets, and religious-spiritual figures like Kabir, Nanak, Bulleh Shah, and Sufi saints (Nandy, 2006, p. 3501). These figures preached the message of humanity, fraternity, and religious synthesis. Their blend of religion is plural and inclusive, unlike sectarian religions. While the local readership mainly understands Tagore as *Kaviraj*, Bard of Bengal, and Gurudev, his works are taxonomised as postcolonial literature (Saha, 2013, p.3). Like Goethe, he was a world citizen and emerged as the apostle of Universal Man (Catlin, 1961, p. 622).

Tagore attempted to develop a synergy between cultural distinctiveness and cosmopolitan inclusiveness. While he criticised the politicisation of cultural identity, he also expected people

to cherish and celebrate cultural distinctiveness and originality (Sen, 2006, p. 105). He dreamed of intercontinental partnerships between East and West. He asserted that Europe has become so arrogant that it has failed to gift others its good elements and simultaneously has failed to accept the wisdom and spirituality of the East (Tagore, 2009, p. 56). This is why, unlike Germans, English scholars studied ancient Indian knowledge with disdain rather than with benevolent insights (Tagore, 2009, p. 57). While modern history speaks about national histories, Catlin (1961, p. 623) states that for Tagore, there is only one history, and it is the history of the whole of humankind. With this perception, he belonged to the greatest humanist tradition, to which belonged Buddha, St. Paul, Erasmus, and Goethe.

Nationalism impedes spiritual progress by organising the communities for a mechanical purpose, and in such an atmosphere, society becomes a stacking of people for economic and political purposes, where it disregards its higher objective. Tagore stated that in the existing social order, where life is monitored by the nationalist force, there will be no evolution of mankind towards spiritualism and integralism. He believed in an interactive and dialogical world, and in this sense, Tagore is a predecessor to Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Noam Chomsky, who advocated transnationalism and globalism (Quayum, 2006, p. 34). Tagore asserted that no single country or continent could be claimed as the only source of the supreme truth. The mind should be free to welcome knowledge from all directions. For the mind to be unchained, the individual should adhere to detachment. This includes detachment towards things as small as a *charkha* because once the mind is committed to anything, it rotates only around it, suffocating creativity and imagination (Mehta, 2019, p. 266). Tagore's universal order demands the domination of reason and imagination against populist madness. More than political freedom, each man first needs to free himself from his greed and viciousness. Tagore's emphasis on universalism against nationalism was often termed by nationalists as slavish reverence to Europe for the Nobel prize (Mukherjee, 1939, p. 28).

Tagore believed that the future age is the age of internationalism. Universal was often used by Western forces as a synonym for Western. According to Tagore, humanism should be universal, and universalism should be humanitarian. In this global order, humans, and not conceited nations and their governments, would be the centre of developmental policy. The developmental scenario would be judged not by material excesses and consumption but by its ability to help man's higher pursuits and promote spiritualism, cosmopolitanism, and mutual cooperation. In his works *Ghare-Baire* and *Gora,* Tagore explores the concept of symbiotic interinfluence between different entities. Contrary to the conventional practice of nationalist

discourse that divides the socio-political landscape into 'Us' and 'Them' or 'Ours' and 'Theirs', Tagore's cosmopolitanism advocates 'This and That' instead of 'This or That'. Similarly, while he rejected fitting India into the European model of nation, he recognised India as *Bharatvarsh*, a cradle of civilisation. While he condemned English polity, he appreciated English culture.

Auguste Comte argued that in the age of individualism, only extended sympathies or the religion of humanity could tackle the pursuits of self-obsessed individuals by shifting their energy towards the general good. A similar advocacy can be found in Tagore's humanist philosophy. However, Comte's programme was full of cultural chauvinism, epitomised French culture and undermined individual creativity and hence, was criticised by Tagore (Nussbaum, 2012, pp. 147-149). Tagore was aware that while *laissez-faire* individualism creates social disarray by driving individuals towards hollow pursuits, nationalist collectivism promotes aggression and conflicts. To move society beyond the isolationism of individualism and authoritarianism, Tagore preached the vision of the universal spiritual unity where each one would be connected with the whole in such a way that the new reconciliation would neither subordinate individual to society nor vice versa and metamorphosis of both would drive humankind from the stage of visceral naivete to divine bliss. While Charles Darwin explained the physical evolution of species, Tagore discusses the metaphysical and mystic evolution of individuals and society. According to him, when society reaches its zenith through humanity and companionship, there remain no contradictions between the interests of an individual and the welfare of all. All outwardly manifested differences disappear, and the individual experiences himself in an organic relationship with the entire cosmos. This evolution is not anything less than *sadhana* to Tagore. Such a level of spiritual revolution would transfer humanity from the existing fragmented-disoriented state of mind into supreme consciousness. Nussbaum (2012, pp. 149-150) states that Tagore saw creative imagination as a 'surplus in man'. In the age of modernity, humans have restricted their artistic imagination. The decline of sympathy and the rise of egocentrism are responsible for the downfall of humanism. With the repudiation of tribalism and the end of racial distinctions, there will be no space for colonialism and racial hegemony, and the future will be based on reciprocity and compassion.

Monotheism has been one of the principal aspects of his universalism. Tagore was neither ritualistic nor an atheist. He believed in a formless omnipotent God who stands higher and free of human-made religions entrenched in scriptures, orthodoxy, and injunctions. In evening prayers at Santiniketan, they would sing, 'The deity Who is in fire and water, nay, Who

pervades the Universe through and through, and makes His abode in tiny plants and towering forest, to such a deity we bow down forever and ever' (Strickland-Anderson, 1924, p. 464). The debate about the compatibility of religion and humanism has persisted for centuries. Tagore considered the credo of organised religions and their dogmas against the inner welfare of humans. In this wake, he developed his 'Religion of Man' or *Manusher Dharm* (1931). Neither does he want humans to remain engulfed in irrational dogmas, nor to be prompted by agnostic materialism. He merged humanity and divinity when he argued that the divine rests within us all, and visualising that God and worshipping him through service to humankind should be our life mission. Tagore was greatly inspired by the life philosophy of the Bauls. Correlating with his Religion of Humanity, Tagore argued that the Bauls,

> who have no images, temples, scriptures, or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity of Man, and express for him an intense feeling of love. Coming from men who are unsophisticated, living a simple life in obscurity, it gives us a clue to the inner meaning of all religions. For it suggests that these religions are never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality (Tagore, 2012, p. 7).

Tagore wanted Bauls' free spirit, overflowing love, simple living, rejoicing moments of life, celebration of life, and acceptance of things as they are, to be a practice among all people. He wanted to develop a synthetic culture by bringing in certain elements of Hinduism, Sufism, and Buddhism. These ideas also inspired the curricula of Visva Bharati.

4.9 Conclusion

Tagore's works express the detrimental consequences of ethnic nationalism, and its danger to humanism and cosmopolitan culture. He aspired for a post-modern, inclusive, ultra-plural, and transnational world order, where reciprocal living should be the purpose of humanity. In times like today, when world democracies, instead of weakening statism by empowering people and communities, end up failing popular sovereignty and contributing to the growth of authoritarianism, a renewed interest in Tagore's philosophy would provide hope for social governance and sacred individualism. The post-colonial world order, though it ensured national sovereignty and the growth of the age of freedom, failed to reverse the growing strength of the state, and its democratic order remained humanistic and liberal in name only. The philosophical reflections on Tagore's thought would provide answers to many of our contemporary sociopolitical problems.

Chapter 5

Tilak's Nationalism, Tagore's Transnationalism, and Contemporary Hindutva: A Comparative Analysis

5.1 Introduction

During the national movement of India, Lokmanya Tilak and Rabindranath Tagore surfaced as contrasting ideologues, each conceptualising distinct approaches and philosophies. Their perspectives clashed on multiple fronts, such as over the idea of India, cultural nationalism, the separation of political and social, educational philosophy, universalism, social homogeneity, secular public space, egalitarianism, and the upliftment of the marginalised. During the first half of the 20th century, an assertive blend of Hindu nationalism started to emerge in the form of Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (henceforth Hindu Mahasabha) in 1915 and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925. While the Hindu Mahasabha initially acted as a pressure group within the Congress and later emerged as a Hindu political party, RSS was a Hindu nationalist sociocultural organisation. While the ideological framework of Hindutva became politically prevalent under the RSS and Bharatiya Jana Sangh (later Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP), the concept was initially popularised by V. D. Savarkar, who became the president of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937. Despite certain differences of opinion, both the Mahasabha and the RSS were staunch opponents of the All-India Muslim League's demand for a separate state for Indian Muslims and Congress's minority-centric secularism and capitulation to the assertive demands of Muslim leaders. In its cumulative form, Hindutva ideology eventually emerged as a major contender for political power during the last decades of the 20th century in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement and Hindu majoritarian politics played a crucial role in the electoral victories of the BJP. In 2014, after a consecutive loss of two terms from 2004 to 2014, the party came back to power with a strong majority at the centre and several states and along with this, it started vigorously implementing its Hindutva project.

This chapter attempts to compare and collate the actions and reflections of Tilak and Tagore with the ideological contentions of the BJP within the premises of nationalism, humanism, and democracy. When one examines the nationalism of Tilak and his course of action within the domain of the national struggle of India and then compares them with the

contemporary Hindu nationalism, one realises that gradually significant changes have occurred in the definition of nation, community, Hinduism, Hinduness, and culture over the past decades. While certain ideological rudiments have largely transformed, others have changed only in their outer manifestations, but their fundamental spirit has not changed to that extent. The intrinsic objective of this chapter is to compare the current Hindutva nationalism with the Hindu nationalism of Tilak and to locate the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. This chapter also attempts to explore whether Tagore's philosophy has any influence on contemporary India's domestic and foreign policies. It also attempts to understand the relevance of his denunciation of nationalism in the present times when Hindutva politics is threatening the secular and tolerant fabric of Indian society.

5.2 Genesis and Disposition of Hindutva Ideology: A Concise Overview

The historical growth of Hindutva nationalism, which eventually became the ideological foundation of the BJP, can be measured in four phases. The Arya Samaj phase, the Savarkar age, the Jan Sangh decades, and post-Ayodhya populism. The Arya Samaj, established by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, made a clarion call for a return to Vedic traditions. The samaj facilitated socialisation and cultivated a communal consciousness and sense of belongingness among upper-caste Hindus (Kumar, 1990, pp. 7-8). His *Shuddhi* movement was focused on reconverting non-Hindus back to Hinduism. His pursuits at social homogenisation fostered the political imagination of a centralised Hindu nation. Saraswati's articulations were the symbiosis of revivalism and reformism. To construct organised Hinduism, he asserted that the Vedas must be treated as the backbone of Hinduism. Contemporary proponents of Hindutva are inspired by 'Dayananda's extreme vision of a unified, monochromatic and aggressive Hinduism…' (Sharma, 2023, p. 33).

Between the 1890s and 1920s, Lokmanya Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo asserted Hindu nationalism within the premises of anti-colonial discourse, while Vivekananda socialised Hinduism by propagating Vedantic spirituality and cultural pride. By the end of the second decade of the 20th century, the national movement was divided into Muslim nationalism, Congress's Indian nationalism, and Hindu nationalism. V. D. Savarkar, a Chitpavan Brahmin and great admirer of Tilak, transformed Hindu nationalism as cultural assertions into Hindutva, an ethnoreligious nationalist ideology. His work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu* defines India as the *Pitrubhumi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holy land) of

Hindus. He asserts that only those who consider Indian territory as their fatherland and holy land are true Indian citizens, and by virtue of that, Muslims and Christians are not fully Indian as their holy land lies outside Indian territory and, due to their divided loyalty, are a challenge to national integration. Heredia highlights that Savarkar conceptualised Hindus as a nation, race, and civilisation. To him, India and Hindus are two sides of the same coin, and he insisted that the land of India belongs to and must be reserved for the Hindus (Heredia, 2009, p. 66). After Tilak's death, his radical followers, who disagreed with Gandhi and his soft, tolerant, and assimilative Hinduism, joined the Hindu Mahasabha (More, 2018, p. 380). Savarkar's terminology of Hindu stood for race and culture as well. Regarding the Sikhs, he asserted that they are Sikh by religion, but by race and culture, they are Hindus (Savarkar, 1969, p. 126).

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded RSS in 1925. Although RSS believed in the varna system, to achieve Hindu assimilation and foster cohesive Hindu nationalism against Muslim assertions, it started propagating selfless individualism, individual solidarity, and Hindu political fraternity. It began admitting youth from marginalised and untouchable communities into its *shakhas* (branches), projecting its social inclusiveness and limited but considerable suspension of caste rules (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 521). M. S. Golwalkar was the second chief of RSS. His work, *We or Our Nationhood Defined,* published in 1939, remained in controversy due to its xenophobic contestation. J. A. Curran argued that the ideology of RSS is largely based on this book (Jha, 2024). Golwalkar transformed RSS into a 'hydra-headed beast or a satanic machine…with a single purpose: manufacturing a Hindu who is supremacist, exclusivist, insecure, and hateful of others' (Apoorvanand, 2024). He offered two alternatives to non-Hindus: either assimilate into the majority's culture or exist as second-class citizens. He stated '...they [Muslims] must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, not even citizen's rights' (Baber, 2000, p. 69). In his Hindu-centric rhetoric, he argued that till Muslims and Christians retain racial, religious, and cultural differences, they will remain foreigners (Golwalkar, 1947, p. 53).

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was a member and Vice-President of the Hindu Mahasabha who left the organisation over internal ideological disagreements. With the backing of the RSS, he founded a political party called Akhil Bharatiya Jana Sangh or simply Jana Sangh in 1951. In 1977, the Jana Sangh, along with other anti-Indira parties, merged to form the Janata Party and successfully won the general election of 1977. However, due to internal differences, the party soon broke into factions. The erstwhile members of Jan Sangh unitedly launched a new party – the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980, the political wing of RSS and champion of Hindutva

nationalism. With the advent of the Ayodhya movement, the consequent *Ratha Yatra*, and the eventual demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992, the BJP emerged as the competent voice of Hindutva nationalism and a major contender for political power. Despite India being a multi-party democracy, since 1999, there has been a bipolarisation of national politics between the Congress Alliance (UPA) and the BJP Alliance (NDA). While the former ideologically adheres to secular and inclusive politics and champions liberal nationalism, the latter strongly advocates Hindutva nationalism, majoritarian policy formulation, Hindu supremacy, and cultural homogenisation. While Hindutva icon Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India in 1996, which lasted only for 16 days as the party failed to prove the majority in the Lok Sabha, from 1998 to 1999 and from 1999 to 2004, he successfully retained the position as the Prime Minister of India. After a decade of electoral defeat between 2004-2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party came back to power in 2014 when it campaigned for Narendra Modi, the firebrand Hindutva icon, as the prime ministerial candidate. Modi consecutively won the general elections of 2014, 2019, and 2024. During his tenure, the BJP expeditiously executed its Hindutva nationalism.

5.3 Hindutva Nationalism: Idolised Statism and Unleashed Populism

After the death of Lokmanya Tilak in 1920, when the Khilafat movement was at its peak, those leaders who found the Congress incompetent to protect Hindu interests disassociated themselves from the Congress to establish Hindu nationalist organisations for cultural resurgence. Among the existing horde of Hindu organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS emerged as flagbearers of Hindu supremacy. The ideological framework of the BJP (erstwhile Jana Sangh) has been profoundly shaped by the ideas of Savarkar and Golwalkar. Despite the party reinterpreting their ideas to align with mainstream secular politics by diluting their resentment towards Muslims and Christians, often the party members have been found publicly eulogising their brand of militant, xenophobic, and communal nationalism. During the Indian national struggle, Hedgewar was directly linked to the close aides of the late Lokmanya Tilak, who were opposing Gandhi's support for Khilafat and his refusal to enter the cow protection movement on the agenda of the Congress at Nagpur (Andersen, 1972, p. 591). Savarkar and Hedgewar were strongly influenced by Tilak's cultural nationalism. Their organisations, namely the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, sowed the seeds of parochial nationalism during the last quarter of the independence movement. The BJP, which presently operates as the epitome

of Hindutva nationalism, is the cumulative product of Savarkar-Sangh ideology. Hence, one can detect a chronological ideological correlation between Tilak and the BJP. Though Hindu ethnocultural nationalism solidified under Savarkar, the idea of Hindu religious-cultural nationalism was initially born, evolved, and grasped a political space under the leadership of Tilak. The abstract definition of Hindu culture propounded by Tilak was institutionalised by Savarkar and the BJP. Brahminism remained the core of Hindu-Hindutva nationalism. Hasan states that for leaders like Tilak, Brahminical Hinduism was the essence of Indian civilisation (Hasan, 2019, p. 53). In its Brahminical approach, RSS had intended opposition to the amendments in the Hindu Code Bill. The Brahminic nature of the BJP had initially encouraged it to oppose the Mandal Commission's recommendations on OBC reservation (Dhawan, 2014, p. 1273). Though Tagore's ideas and the BJP ideology are founded on Hindu canons, the former aspired for spiritual Hinduism and philosophical reflections, the latter emphasises political Hinduism and adheres to ritualism. While the Hindutva nationalist party advocates brahminism, Tagore advocates Brahmoism and universal spirit.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic liberalisation, which by then had taken a central stage in the global economy, began to dominate the political economy of third-world nations. The neo-liberal policies in India shifted the administrative focus from a mixed economy and agrarian protectionism to pro-industrialisation. Observing the rapidly booming middle class in urban India, its political aspirations, and its futile efforts to achieve an ideal balance of modernity and traditionality, the right-wing parties, such as the BJP, began to invoke historical grievances, anti-elite sentiments, cultural vulnerability, majoritarian supremacy, and religious pride to strengthen their populist nationalism. It has been the petty bourgeoisie from urban and semi-urban areas that emerged as the hardcore followers of Hindutva populism and its slogan to revamp the Hindu glory. While under Vajpayee, the party partially condemned the liberal economy, under Modi's leadership, it pursued a full-fledged market economy (Ghosh, 2020). Through its Hindutva project (though the party succeeded in generating a sense of cultural vulnerability among the Hindu middle class), it tacitly covered the economic disparities or vulnerabilities emerging from neo-liberal economic policies by diverting the public focus towards cultural conservation, vilification of traditional political leadership as elites, and classification of itself as the voice of the middle class. It hypnotised the social consciousness in such a way that it received majoritarian legitimacy to its rule, which stands beyond mere electoral victory. The propaganda of cultural preservation through state machinery contributed to the messianization of the state and the government. Rabindranath Tagore, as the champion

of coercion-free humanity, had warned against the worship of the state and the glorification of political slavery. For him, culture is the humane experience that does not require a political fortification. While the BJP strategically employs state machinery to protect and preserve the monolithic Hindu culture, Tagore was not a cultural protectionist. For him, true culture is universal and is not limited by national borders. It does not require the protection of the state (Aikant, 2020, p. 147). In contemporary India, rational critique of the state policies is defined as anti-national. Hindutva populism disparages rational intellectual dissidents. Patomaki (2020, p. 7) argues that 'Populism involves hostility to the status quo, people-elite dichotomy, appeal to the people, mistrust of traditional politicians/elite, and anti-intellectualism'. Patomaki asserts that populism relies on nationalism, resorts to demagogy over rational dialectics, despite the glorification of popular sovereignty, adopts authoritarianism, delegitimises opposition, and curtails freedom. Its charismatic leader, who projects oneself as a messiah, emerges as an authoritarian leader (Patomaki, 2020, pp. 7-8).

While Tagore endorsed pluralism, Brahmoism, and Hindu multiplicity, both Tilak and the BJP asserted Hindu majoritarianism and homogenisation. Tagore's *Bharatvarsher Itihas* depicts '…India as a syncretic civilisation, accommodating plurality and diversity…' (Bhattacharya, 2020, p. 41). Cultural homogenisation and the simultaneous erosion of cultural plurality have been the core mission of Hindutva nationalism, which believes in a singular ethnocultural identity and a linear monolithic past of India. The state-sponsored homogenisation crusade not only affects education, democracy, minorities, and symbiotic living but also deprives the Hindu community of its intrinsic and natural diversity by categorising it as a monocultural community (Gupta, 2024). The state-sponsored cultural standardisation crusade to protect, promote, and rather impose majoritarian culture and to build a confessional state unleashed the forces of vigilantism, vandalism, and hooliganism across India, fostering an atmosphere of anxiety, uncertainty, and violence:

> It is this claiming of honourable bloodshed by Hindu mobs as part of a proud recapitulation of Hindu publicness, and the feeble attempts on the part of the state and its functionaries to censure such violence, that reveals most clearly a vigilante public. It is precisely the fascist consciousness of this vigilante public that is called upon and mobilised by the BJP in its attempt to secure electoral victory and immunity from all charges (Banaji, 2018, p. 337).

Vigilantism and nationalism have always been interconnected. Tilak's provocative speeches had contributed to several communal riots in Maharashtra. It even encouraged the Chapekar brothers to murder British officer Rand in 1897. Tagore denounced nationalism for the very

reason that it unleashes the forces of violence and rampage that disrupt peace and harmony. In *Ghare-Baire*, Sandip and his swadeshi volunteers burn the stock of foreign clothes of poor Panchu, who had purchased it to sell and make a minimal profit for living (Tagore, 1957, pp. 135-136). The victimhood nationalism and its moral panic have contributed to the significant growth of vigilante violence in contemporary India, representing a strategic shift in communal politics. The state's complicity provides these forces a tacit approval, and their non-state actor status helps the government to retain the communal momentum without receiving any direct backlash. The sense of deprivation and historical injustice built within them, accusing the Mughals, British, and later Congress government of exploiting and marginalising the Hindu community with their minority appeasement or anti-Hindu policies, has fuelled communal resentment. These vigilante groups, full of enthusiasm, anger, excessive pride, and overconfidence, believe in vigilante entitlement and the superiority of their judgment. They believe they possess a natural right to take the law into their own hands to restore righteousness and assist the government in social homogenisation. Jaffrelot (2022, pp. 216-220) argues that Gau Raksha Dal (GRD), Bajrang Dal (BD), and Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV) are some of the most prominent and active Hindu vigilante groups which work hand-in-hand with the state machinery and complete those exercises which the latter cannot perform within the constitutional framework. *Gau Rakshaks* (Cow protectors) of the GRD attack the trucks transporting cows at night and brutally assault the drivers and others with hockey sticks if found to be Muslim. If found to be Hindu, they receive a reprimand. Rather, there is an unofficial division of duties between the police and the cow vigilantes. While the police provide supervision, vigilantes use muscle power. Besides this, moral policing, anti-love Jihad vigilantism, and anti-conversion vigilantism also operate across North India.

Hindutva's monocultural imposition, which on one hand is Hindu majoritarianism and on the other hand is anti-Muslim and anti-Christian propaganda, consists of multiple activities such as *Ghar Wapsi*, Sanskritisation, Brahminical normativity, Hindutva-centric mobilisation of Bahujans, obliteration of literature and perspectives critical of Hindutva, romanticisation of Brahminic order, stigmatisation and marginalisation of Muslims as potential national threat and anti-Hindu crowd, demonisation of Mughals and consequently of Indian Muslims as aggressive mob, promotion of Sanskritised Hindi and Devnagari, communalisation of politics through regular hate speeches, overlooking mobocracy and strategic silence over mob lynching by cow vigilantes, providing impunity to those accused of violence or fostering hate against Muslims and Christians, labelling Marxist and secular scholars as anti-nationals and Urban

Naxals, declaring ultra-nationalist movies tax free, villainising Muslims through Hindu nationalist movies, restricting the scope of religious freedom of Muslims and Christians, renaming roads and places by replacing their Islamic names, prohibiting entry to Christian missionaries in India and deporting already functioning Christian NGO's and missionaries, imprisoning academicians and scholars criticising governmental tyranny, censorship of public dissent, saffronising bureaucracy, amending citizenship laws, stigmatising beef consumption, popularising Brahminic values as Hindu high-culture, fuelling Hindu insecurities to retain the communal momentum, boasting of military prowess, demolishing properties of Muslim defendants, promoting islamophobia, etc. While the BJP is accused of censoring dissent and curtailing press freedom, Tilak and Tagore had strongly advocated for freedom of speech. Tagore's *Ghare-Baire*, *Gora*, and *Nationalism* had been the ardent critique of mainstream nationalism of their day (Sirur, 2019). In *Ghare-Baire,* he associated swadeshi vigilantes like Sandip with hooliganism. Tilak remained a strong supporter of press freedom. Due to his radical journalism in *Kesari* and *Mahratta*, he faced the backlash of the British government on several occasions (PTI, 2023).

While Tagore advocated positive social reconstruction outside the control of the state through direct participation of the people that outdo statism and Tilak's swaraj emphasised good governance, representation of public interests, and moral administration, contemporary India shows an increase in the public tendencies of over-reliance on the government, romanticisation of authoritarianism, voluntary servitude, and validation of developmental autocracy for immediate socio-economic reformation. The dependency culture, democratic fatigue, and civic apathy created a conducive environment for the emergence of authoritarianism under the BJP rule. Chakrabarty (2021, p. 142) highlights Tagore's conviction that when society ceases to perform a developmental role in a cooperative spirit and relies on political institutions to handle social governance and development, the result has always been catastrophic. Chacko (2018, p. 543) argues that the failure of UPA-II (2009-2014) to resolve the structural crisis and bureaucratic corruption, and growing disparities due to neo-liberalisation despite the government's social welfare programmes, not only generated popular consent against the secular-liberal state as an incompetent system and people began to condemn western-modelled democracy but the simultaneous rise of cultural consciousness in social spaces through *gurus* like Baba Ramdev convinced people of the necessity of authoritarian government for socioeconomic change and cultural restoration. While populist enthusiasts support the BJP's neoliberal market policies to make India a superpower by ignoring its

socioeconomic implications and idealising economic martyrdom, in the cultural space it wants the state to adopt cultural conservatism to define and protect the culture elevated as national. The populist government has satisfied the public conscience through tokenism but has restricted the democratic framework to elections alone. Poulantzas (2014, as cited in Chacko, 2018, p. 544) defines authoritarian statism as the concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister or President, erosion of parliamentarian authority and the role of political parties, overlap or failure of separation of powers between state organs, and instead of the government drafting policies by consulting diverse social groupings, the government articulates policies at its will and the public have to adapt to those policies. The state maintains support for its policies through ideological indoctrination and social engineering of consent.

Modi's Hindutva nationalism asserts that the whole, that is the nation, is greater than the sum of its parts, that is, people. It expects resilience from people regarding day-to-day inconvenience and sacrifices, which are contextualised as doggedness towards the collective progress of the nation. During the chaos of Demonetisation and COVID-19, the people were urged to patiently undergo personal hardship for the collective good or redemption through suffering (Menon, 2016). Both Tilak and Gandhi, in their diverse narratives, i.e. physical aggression and passive force, respectively, had asked people to voluntarily endure suffering for the national cause. Tilak and his associates had even tried to open an arms factory in Nepal in 1903 (Varma, 1958, p. 22). Contrarily, Tagore, who firmly believed in the objectivity and universality of righteousness, had opposed the philosophical glorification of suffering, coercion, and martyrdom for the nation. An authoritarian system projects a correlation between the nation and the family. Patomaki (2020, p. 17) argues that while neo-liberalism prioritises family for economic reasons, i.e. shouldering responsibility for education, health, etc, neo-conservatism defends its moral necessity. This convergence develops prototypes and conceptual relationships and demonstrates the nation as an extended family. Between the biological family and the imagined family, there is an amalgamation of neoliberalism, family structure, and nationalism. In this cumulative process of formulating meanings and identities, it becomes plausible to cultivate family values pertaining to religion and civilisation.

While Tilak attempted to construct Hindu ethnicity against Muslim brotherhood, Tagore disliked all forms of artificial homogenisation. Tilak viewed secularism as an unnational tendency that damages the very fabric that has woven people (Hindus) into the Hindu nation (Rao, 2011, p. 20). On the other hand, Tagore trusted in the multicultural identity of individuals and communal diversity. 'India tolerated difference[s] of races from the first,

and that spirit of toleration has acted all through her history' (Tagore, 2009, p. 62). The BJP's Hindutva project has been attempting to ethnicise Hindus by categorising them as an ethnicity and race with a common lineage instead of a loosely connected family of sects. By virtue of their Aryan blood and high culture, they are declared superior to other minorities. Its ethnocentrism has given rise to fascist tendencies. Comparing Modi and Hitler, Zwanenberg (2022, pp. 105-106) argues that America and other capitalist countries turn a blind eye to Modi's fascism as he ensures free trade and capitalist liberalism. Hence, his fundamentalism receives criticisms from within instead of from outside. Mehta (2022, pp. 43-44) argues that Hindu nationalism in contemporary times has emerged into authoritarian fascism. The nation-state has become the object of blind reverence, and there has been a rise of moral cretinism where compassion, truth, civility, and morality are objects of contempt while antipathy, aggression, ego, and coercion are cherished virtues. The moral degradation of society is supplemented by the indifference of the state towards social disturbances. Aggression and xenophobia have been a part of Hindutva ideology since its inception. Balakrishna Moonje, the mentor of Hedgewar and a prominent personality within RSS, visited Mussolini in 1931 to learn about the recruitment and training of young Italian boys to form a fascist paramilitary. Making it their *modus operandi*, RSS runs its *shakhas*, where the recruits are given semi-military training to contribute to the Hindutva mission (Leidig, 2020, p. 222). The Hindu Mahasabha was openly admiring the Third Reich. Building a connection between Hindutva and Nazism, Savarkar, in his speeches and writings, asserted that the Muslim problem of India needs to be treated the way Nazis treat Jews (Leidig, 2020, pp. 222-223). Not as harsh as Savarkar and Hindutva brigade, but Tilak held a negative view of Muslims as a threat to Hindus; However, Tagore considered both as part of India and India yet is greater than these differences (Choudhury, 2020, p. 52). While RSS was inspired by fascist paramilitary training of youth, Tagore deeply condemned the rise of Mussolini in Italy. He wrote 'the principles of Fascism concern all humanity and it is absurd to imagine that I could ever support a movement which ruthlessly supresses freedom of expression,… and walks a bloodstained path of violence and stealthy crime' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 175). He even criticised Nazism as a cannibalistic political culture (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 175).

BJP's Hindutva nationalism is a combination of Gellner's definition of nationalism as the congruence of the political and national unit, and Billig's Banal Nationalism wherein nationalism is a routinised conditioning process which reinforces allegiance towards the nation-state and idolises nation as a supreme communion through nationalistic news making, national

anthem and national pledge in schools, celebration of national festivals, reverence of national symbols, etc. The cultural homogenisation project of Hindutva camaraderie is a more gradual process, instead of revolutionary homogenisation like Russification. Instead of imposing homogeneity from the top, the party creates a conducive environment by cultivating a sense of vulnerability into a majoritarian conscience, which gives birth to dichotomous thinking, which divides people, past, and perspectives into favourable and harmful to survival. The survival instincts lead to polarisation, unite the 'endangered' majority, and consequently foster homogenisation from inside (Singh, 2023). This homogenisation process is a three-dimensional agenda and more than a passive revivalism. Firstly, it seeks to unite Hindus across castes through nominal religious unity in political space. Secondly, it aims to build social consensus to validate the politically motivated eradication of Islamic identities and marginalisation of Muslims. Thirdly, it seeks to reclaim the lost past glory through the promotion of Sanskrit, Ayurveda, the reconstruction of Hindu temples allegedly destroyed by Muslim rulers, etc.

Instead of Sanskritisation and overt imposition of Brahminical values, the BJP prefers composite ethnicisation. It defines Hindu in a demographic term, uses cultural material for religious demarcation, and involves all non-Muslims and non-Christians in its political Hindutva. This ethnicisation helped the BJP to construct homogeneity within plurality and include all streams from Vivekananda to Ambedkar (Mehta, 2022, p. 39). The Hindu nation is supplemented by the Hindu state, whose role is to protect and preserve the Hindu nation. While the nation is constant, the state is permitted to modernise to suit the needs of the nation. Besides the state, the entire citizenry, Hindu or otherwise, needs to show allegiance to the culture of the nation and respect its symbols, heritage, and past (Mehta, 2022, p. 40). Tilak too looked at religion as a medium to construct Hindu solidarity. While he politicised the Ganesh festival to unite Hindus both against Muslims and the British, he had no objective of constructing Hindu homogeneity, the way Hindutva forces aspire. Tagore condemned every effort to replace social plurality with homogeneity. He held India as 'an immense mass of heterogeneity' (Quayum, 2025, p. 398).

Unlike the previous elections, the general election of 2014 occurred at the peak point of the age when social media had reached the remotest areas of India providing Sangh Parivar and BJP with leverage to use the 'corrupt' image of Congress and 'Hindu saviour' image of Modi to bombard social media with pro-Modi ideas, memes, articles, jargons, and images. It was also the time when Hindutva ideology moved beyond its institutional framework, started dominating virtual society, and reached the grassroots level. Using the term 'neo-Hindutva',

Anderson argues that it falls into two categories: hard and soft. While the hard neo-Hindutva explicitly displays chauvinism, aggressiveness, and assertiveness by ignoring moral and legal restraints through organisations like Hindu Yuva Vahini, the Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, Voice of India, the Forum for Hindu Awakening, Shri Ram Sena, and other vigilante bodies, the soft neo-Hindutva conceals its aspirations under the façade of spiritualism, patriotism, and secularisation of cultural nationalism. It operates through organisations like the India Foundation think tank, the Hindu Forum of Britain, the National Council of Hindu Temples (UK), and the Vedic Foundation in America (Anderson, 2015, as cited in Anderson & Longkumer, 2018, p. 373). While the former is critical of RSS and BJP for not being proactive enough, the latter agrees to achieve ideological goals by functioning within the framework of constitutional democracy and liberal society.

5.4 Curricular Nationalism and the Fabrication of History

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the thought process of students and implanting scientific temperament, critical inquiry, and humanist ideals in them, essential to raise them as conscientious citizens. Rationalised cognition enables them to recognise and resist the state's encroachment on rights, liberties, and justice. Tilak, Tagore, and the Hindutva government have distinct approaches to education and history.

Tilak was one of the earliest proponents of the consolidation of nationalism and education in modern India. He argued that English education depicts Indian society and culture as backward and uncivilised. Such a form of mental training not only catalyses an inferiority complex amongst Indians but compels them to perceive the cultural heritage with disdain. In his educational philosophy, he argued that the vernacular schools must be established with a primary objective to teach true culture to youth so that they can be prevented from disliking national heritage amidst misguidance. Rather, schools and colleges must inculcate pride towards indigeneity and nationalist fervour among students. He considered educational institutions as a medium to fuse nationalism among students.

Tagore considered education and nationalism as two opposite ends. While education aims to transform the students, liberate their minds, and instil humanist virtues in them, nationalism promotes false pride, narrow-mindedness, blind devotion, and voluntary servitude. What separates Tagore from Tilak's and Hindutva's approach to education and history is his denunciation of the nationalist tone of education, which the other two strongly recommended

to produce a generation of patriots imbued with national pride. He viewed education as a liberating force which promotes intellectualism, humanism, and creativity against patriotic education, which hampers free-thinking, paralyses moral judgement, and mentally imprisons individuals who surrender to the cult of nationalism. Tagore feared that state-sponsored nationalist education would destroy the unmonitored social environment necessary for the free movement of ideas. Such an education would promote communal disharmony and damage social solidarity. Nationalist education detaches man from the rest of humanity and prevents him from aspiring for universal human unity. Tagore opposed politically influenced education, even if it was for the cause of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle. While Tagore emphasised truth, intellectualism, rationalism, scientific temperament, critical inquiry, and free speech as principles of true education (Barik, 2024, p. 729), the contemporary Hindutva government is criticised for failing to provide an unmonitored academic space. The school textbooks are being modified and revised to push the Hindutva version of history. The schools are becoming a medium to silently preach party ideology and inculcate nationalistic virtues. Parts of the knowledge that contradict the ideology are purposely eliminated from books (Anand & Lall, 2022, pp. 88-91). While Hindutva forces are criticised for communalising the sphere of education, it was Tagore who had faith that it is only through education and conscious efforts that the Hindu-Muslim divide can be eliminated (O'Connell, 2020, p. 94). He wanted the formation of an educational system in India that would foster social integration (O'Connell, 2020, p. 92).

The present Hindutva education policy is infested with pseudo-nationalism, ideological indoctrination, irrationalism, and distortion of history. The Modi government is blamed for saffronisation and Hindutvisation of the Indian education system. Contrary to the moral obligation of the political class to honour the sanctity of academic spaces and nurture a social atmosphere conducive to the growth of scientific knowledge, the ideological compulsion of the Hindutva party to remediate the curricula, which, according to them, is infested with a Marxist approach and pseudo-secularism, has hampered the research and learning culture. Disregarding academic credentials, several academic offices were offered to RSS ideologues (Tharamangalam, 2016, p. 305). It has also instilled false pride among students towards India's past, who now prefer emotion over reason in learning.

The Hindutva government attempts to wipe out the Western influence on India by the indigenisation of education. It aims to reconstruct the unique identity of India, distinct from the one narrated by Western historians. These neo-revivalist tendencies assert that the present

Indian education system is a continuation of the colonial education policy, which promotes a Eurocentric curriculum, venerates Western culture, and keeps Hindus ignorant of their rich intellectual traditions. As long as colonial historiography and Orientalist narratives remain prominent in the Indian education system, the mental decolonisation of India cannot be achieved. J. Sai Deepak, a proponent of Hindu ethnocentrism and Hindutva sympathiser states that while the post-colonial school considers politico-administrative decolonisation as the end of colonialism and true liberation of nations, the decolonial school argues that colonial mentality and mental colonisation (state of mind) have survived the political decolonisation (state of affairs) and even today continues to control the former colonies (Deepak, 2021, p. 30). While the direct colonisation has largely ended, the former colonisers are now practising subterranean colonisation. To keep the erstwhile colonies dependent on them and monitor and regulate them, they have invested heavily in their religious, legal, political, and knowledge systems. This system is sustained by the independent nations without being aware of the ambitions of the colonisers (Deepak, 2021, p. 39).

The Hindutva government has been a detractor of empirical and critical historians, whose works dispel the romanticisation of history followed by nationalists. Scholars who positively criticise India or profess opinions contrary to the Hindutva narrative on history are ridiculed as leftists, anti-nationals, and pseudo-historians. Rajalakshmi (2022) argues that the National Education Policy (NEP) of the BJP provides a framework for Hindutvaisation, privatisation, and corporatisation of education. While Hindutvaisation would make education a medium of ideological indoctrination and marginalise Bahujan and minority perspectives, privatisation would strip it of its universal character. Like Tilak, the BJP believes in teaching religious texts in educational institutions and holds that ancient Hindu texts are an encyclopaedia of timeless knowledge. Often, the Hindutva policy of decolonisation of education is referred to as 'de-Macaulayisation'. It is against the principle of scientific inquiry as it diminishes the culture of research by labelling the research-based knowledge as Western propaganda if found to be against the Hindutva idea of India. The NEP-2020 appears to be a cultural agenda which is more political than educational, as it emphasises the inclusion of (Hindu) Indian ethos among students, suitable for the Hindutva-corporate nexus. Basu (2023, p. 10) in this context writes:

> However, the [NEP] document does not define the 'Indian'. Bulldozing the rich diversity, reinforcing social stratification and exclusion, it does not elaborate on how it will relate to the changing landscape and the global knowledge commons. It also does not underline the need for nurturing scientific temper; with an unabashed advocacy of the glory of the past and not to mention a complete silence about the rich history

> of assimilation towards composite syncretic development. With eloquent silence, the policy has stopped short of spelling out the Hindutva straightjacket [*sic*].

Historical narratives and public consciousness are interconnected. The BJP and RSS are accused of distorting history and promoting pseudo-historical narratives. The RSS-managed schools are criticised for preaching anti-Muslim narratives both inside and outside the class. The BJP government was criticised for distorting NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) books in 2002 to promote its perception of history. Historical conflicts of the pre-colonial and colonial eras were presented more from the perspective of the Kshatriya class battling invaders, mainly Muslims. The subaltern history, Dalit and tribal movements, peasant uprisings, and feminist literature were either erased from the syllabus or manipulated to glorify the *savarna* class. Indian history was presented as the account of a great civilisation which was experiencing its golden epoch since antiquity before it was invaded by barbaric Muslim rulers during medieval times. The history was presented in the binary of black and white, virtuous and vicious, conflicts between Hindus and Muslim invaders and later British colonisers. In some BJP-governed states, the Vidhya Bharati, the educational wing of RSS, designed the syllabus of schools, which projected aggressive Hindu supremacy and hate for Muslims. The history and geography of the nation were collectively visualised from the grand vision of *Akhand Bharat*. Hindu kings such as Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, and Prithviraj were taught as icons of great valour, and Muslim kings were largely antagonised. The works of scholars belonging to German romanticism, like Herder and Schelling, which validate the greatness of Hindu-Aryan culture and scriptures, were popularised as a universal recognition of the superiority of Hindu India. Puranas became historical sources, and mythical figures were presented as historical persons (Sarkar, 2024, pp. 193-197).

Tilak's nationalist education, Tagore's Santiniketan, Gandhi's Nai Talim, Vivekananda's scheme of education, and Aurobindo's philosophy of education, desired the indigenisation of education to promote native intellect, philosophy, and thoughts to build India different from the capitalist West where spiritual growth is subordinated to material and capital growth, where acquisitiveness is glorified over enlightenment, and where education is exclusively directed towards generating economic man with least emphasis on moral well-being. Although even the Hindutva government honestly aspires to Indianise the education system and endorse Indic intelligence, the bureaucratic hurdles and its ideological essentialism hamper the dialogical space and educational ecosystem. More than the Indianisation of education, the party has been criticised for the saffronisation of education. Mukherjee (2024) argues that the government is

eagerly working to promote the learning of the Bhagavad Gita and Hindu epics in schools. Historical references that expose the weak spots of the ruling ideology are carefully eliminated under the pretext of syllabus rationalisation. Similarly, the government's push to ban the Hijab in educational institutions has been criticised as a move to alienate Muslim girls from education.

The indigenisation of education demands decolonisation of knowledge, but the attempts to exclude Western knowledge and subaltern perspectives from the education would homogenise and hegemonise the education system, making it a tool in the hands of the elite class to promote dominant ideology. Such epistemic control would cease the natural growth of the knowledge which occurs under the argumentative tradition and the free flow of information. The educational reformism under Hindutva rule that has aimed at decolonisation of education would lead to internal colonisation and social stagnation. Hindutva government refuses to acknowledge the subjectivity of knowledge and maintains hostility towards contrary perspectives (Hasan, 2025). Since it regained power in 2014, it has been blamed for suppressing anti-establishment student politics. On the other hand, Tilak's national education aimed to build student politics against British imperialism.

The BJP government has been criticised for using administration, state machinery, and non-state actors to suppress the dissent of opposition, academicians, critics, students, and scholars who condemn its crude nationalism and anti-democratic style of governance. From internet shutdowns to the prohibition of the BBC documentary on Narendra Modi, these actions reflect the government's intolerance of dissent (Basu & Sen, 2024, pp. 42-44). Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, M. M. Kalburgi, and Gauri Lankesh were the prominent Indian rationalist critics and scholars who were assassinated due to their dissent. The silence of the government on these murders, the Hindu fundamentalist background of the accused, and the incompetence of law-and-order bodies to crack down on culprits raised doubts about the future of critical inquiry and cultural introspection in India (Malekar, 2016). The suppression of dissent will hamper democracy, rationalism, civil society, and efforts towards the prevention of moral corruption in society.

In Hindutva-ruled India, Kumar (2024) argues that student activism is suppressed to prevent the participation of students in anti-establishment protests, the raising of socio-economic issues affecting society at large is prohibited, and social revolution is suppressed. It aims to create docile labour for capitalist production. The overindulgence of politically motivated

bureaucracy in determining the right course of education and teaching, rather than permitting teachers to instil intellectualism among students, will not only deteriorate the standards of education but also kill the spirit of social change. Sharma states that the critics of NEP-2020 assert that the education policy is intoxicated with the Hindutva worldview and attempts saffronisation of education. It undermines the secular, cohesive, and liberal approach to education, which is detrimental to Hindutva hegemony (Sharma, 2016, p. 144). During PM Vajpayee's tenure, the educational curriculum was modified to suit the party's ideological inclinations. It eulogised the Hindu India and the Aryan race, and episodes, such as the assassination of Gandhi, which stigmatise Hindutva ideology, were carefully eliminated. The Muslim rule was presented in the binary of Hindu victim and Muslim victimiser, thus validating the rise of militant Hindu nationalism of contemporary India (Pardesi & Oetken, 2008, p. 34).

Rather than accepting the past as it was, the Hindutva body reinterprets history through the prism of emotions and beliefs to pacify its ideology and agenda, since the raw history fosters cognitive dissonance among them. Instead of adjusting one's perceptions to rational history, perspectives are rationalised by distorting history and presenting it in the binary of moral absolutism. Hasan (2002, p. 200) argues that saffronisation and fabricated knowledge fill minds with preconceived prejudices even before students become capable of rational judgment. It creates fanaticism, promotes sectarian consciousness and hostilities, and hampers students' natural inclination towards balanced and cautious analysis. Hasan (2002, p. 202) called the conscious omissions of certain episodes of history from the textbooks an effort to Talibanise India's history.

5.5 Hindutva Populism and Scapegoating of Muslims

The vicious dichotomy of the innocent Hindu and the Muslim problem has become dominant within Indian politics. While the Hindutva ideology legitimises othering, alienation, and persecution of Muslims, the secular framework of Indian democracy protects their Indian existence. Muslims, the second highest religious majority in India, were widely perceived by Hindu nationalists during the colonial as well as in the post-colonial period as antagonists and an obscured danger to Hindus. Back then, Tilak's communally infiltrated speeches had sown the seed of Hindu-Muslim polarisation as early as the 1890s. His provocative speeches had sparked communal riots between Hindus and Muslims during 1892-93. Tilak's discourse on Hindu nationalism exhibited Muslims as a radical, intolerant, and anti-Hindu mob. Today, even

a century after the demise of Tilak in 1920, such lethal narratives against Muslims have not escaped popular consciousness. Rather, these narratives have reached new heights of communalism in contemporary decades. Although the majority of Indian Muslims are native to India, their mere adherence to Islam provides ample leeway to the Hindutva faction to associate them with Muslim invaders of the past. This position of contemporary Hindutva is similar to that of Savarkar, for whom Muslims are not completely Indian as their holy land is not India. Today, several times, in public speeches and on social media posts, they have been derogatorily called *'Babur ki aulad'* (Babur's progeny) to provoke and humiliate them, besides asking them to leave India and move to Pakistan (Kapur, 2022). Even after the partition of India to create Pakistan, a separate state for Muslims, stigmatisation and marginalisation of those Muslims who accepted India as their homeland and preferred to stay back continued. The creation of Pakistan pushed Indian Muslims into an endless loop of proving their loyalty towards India. Generally, any objectionable act or crime committed by a non-Muslim is observed from a context-sensitive lens, but if found to be committed by a Muslim, it is often propagated as treachery and conspiracy against the Hindus or the nation. Islamophobia has been rationalised to such an extent that they are consistently perceived with suspicion when it comes to the question of national security, and the jingoists associate them with terrorists and terrorism (Maizland, 2024). Anti-Muslim slogans such as '*Batenge toh katenge, ek rahenge toh safe rahenge'* (divided, we will be slaughtered, united, we will be safe), '*Mandir wahi Banayenge'* (we will build the temple there), '*Mein Durga banungi, Kaali banuungi per burkha wali nahi banungi'* (I will become goddess Durga, goddess Kali but not a burqa-wearing woman), and *'Ayodhya toh bas jhanki hai, Kashi-Mathura baki hai'* (Ayodhya is just a preview, Kashi and Mathura is next in line), often get raised in public space (Valeri, 2025; Nath, 2024; Tiwari, 2019).

Since the Hindutva party formed the government, the intensity of WhatsApp messages calling for a social boycott of Muslims has increased. The fundamentalism reached its peak when the Uttar Pradesh government asked shopkeepers and vendors to put up a nameplate in front of their shops, highlighting the name (implying the religion) of the seller or owner. Such moves contribute to blatant communal discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation. During the Nazi rule in Germany, Jews were compelled to wear the badge of the Yellow Star of David while going in public to display their Jewish identity (Srivastava, 2024). Similarly, the stars were painted on the doors and windows of Jewish houses and shops for easy recognition for banishment under the anti-Jewish policies. In school textbooks, as part of the

antisemitic propaganda, caricatures were added in a manner that ugliness, untrustworthiness, and viciousness could be outlined as attributes of Jews. A similar kind of state-sponsored alienation and demonisation of Muslims is occurring in contemporary India. In fictionalised and overdramatised historical narratives in books, films, news media, pamphlets, and social media, Indian Muslims are painted as barbaric, vicious, anti-social, untrustworthy, and anti-Indian. In Nazi Germany, Jews were blamed for the defeat of Germany in World War I and its overall downfall. During the first wave of COVID-19, when it was rapidly spreading in the summer of 2020, Muslims and their organisations like Tablighi Jamaat were falsely castigated for spreading the pandemic by deliberately disobeying the rules of lockdown. Although these allegations lacked strong evidence, the news media and social media repeated them on a loop, making it a nightmare for the already frightened masses. Clips of the Muslim gatherings and mosques were shown in the news related to COVID-19, indirectly drawing prejudiced conclusions. The term Corona Jihad dominated the space of islamophobia on digital platforms. The mute spectatorship of the government during such stigmatisation and its passivity in preventing the spread of such news raised doubts. Kadiwal, (2023, p. 740) argues that during the coronavirus pandemic, xenophobia against Muslims reached its peak when the media campaigns, cellular messages, social media content, and political expressions were flooded with narratives which accused Muslims of purposely engaging in activities that could proliferate the virus across India and erode the Hindus. The demands were made to quarantine the 'Corona jihadis' and declare Muslim-dominant areas as the buffer zone. The public sentiments were exploited to justify the demand for the ghettoisation of Muslims.

Regarding the consumption of beef, Muslims are accused of purposely hurting the religious sentiments of the Hindu majority, which allegedly worships the cow as mother. This frenzy has contributed to several incidents of mob lynching of Muslims by cow vigilantes on the pretext of their illegally smuggling of cows or beef. The number of such lynchings has increased substantially since 2014. Jaffrey (as cited in Asif, 2024, p. 3) argues that vigilantism is used in India by right-wing parties to silently oppress minorities. The vigilantes, who take the law into their own hands and assault minorities as per their (non)sense of justice and righteousness, enjoy impunity and indirectly receive political and legal protection. Muslims are considered incompatible with Hindu-Indian values. Citing the miseries inflicted by Muslim invaders on Hindus by destroying their places of worship and by using the logic of transitivity, Muslims of contemporary India are projected as a potential danger to Hinduism. The Hindutva ecosystem defines Muslims as enemies, anti-nationals, terrorists, and an immediate danger to

national security (Kadiwal, 2023, p. 735). Although a significant population of Hindus consume meat or fish, the Hindutva ideologues, both within and outside the party, project Hindus as a vegetarian community whose aura and religious vivacity are being damaged by beef-consuming Muslims.

The Hindutva nationalists argue that Muslims should assimilate into the larger philosophy and sociology of Hinduism instead of adhering to their distinct religious identity. They should acknowledge and surrender to the centrality of Hinduism to India, accept Ram as a national hero, brand Muslim rulers and invaders as destroyers of Hindu temples and artefacts, and demand no special privileges in the form of personal law, minority rights, and grant of aid for their educational institutions. Their submission to the supremacy of Hindu culture and civilizational values is their first qualification to prove their loyalty towards the nation (Varshney, 1993, p. 231). Homogenising Indian society by replacing, altering, or assimilating elements of plurality is the intent of Hindutva nationalism. Whether it is the *Ghar Wapsi* project or the abrogation of Article 370, whether it is the beef ban or the attempt to close down Madrasa education, and whether it is the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) to deport illegal but only Muslim immigrants or to bring back mainly Hindus from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, all these efforts focus on building Hindu Rashtra and imposing Hindutva nationalists' idea of Indian citizenry on Muslims to achieve ethnocultural homogenisation.

The persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany is a historical episode of state-sponsored oppression of an ethnoreligious group. After becoming the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Hindutva icon Yogi Adityanath started a 'bulldozer culture' in the state, which later began to be imitated by Chief Ministers of other BJP-ruled states. The bulldozing of homes and properties belonging to Muslims suspected of perpetrating violence against Hindus or challenging the state coercion demonstrates institutionalised repression and extrajudicial penalising of Muslims (Ali, 2024). Similarly, the state government of UP has followed the practice of extrajudicial encounter killing of criminals, mainly Muslims. The Hindutva forces assert that contemporary hostilities between Muslims and Hindus are a result of historical wrongs committed by Muslim invaders against Hindus. Their apprehension stems from a constructed narrative of Hindus as a victimised, vulnerable, and declining race, due to their naïve faith in secularism and religious tolerance. Hence, they justify saffronisation as a remedy to protect and preserve the religion and culture of Hindus. Despite Hindus making up nearly 79 per cent of India's population, the nationalists maintain that at the international level, Hindus form a minority compared to Christians and Muslims, and above that, the secular character of

the Indian republic makes the cultural preservation even more difficult for Hindus as they do not have any theocratic state of their own. Hence, the demand for the formation of the Hindu Rashtra arises (Sen, 2022). The significant increase in the Muslim population in India and the declining percentage of the Hindu population further cause anxiety among the nationalists, who demand population control laws to prevent demographic shifts and halt the population growth of Muslims (Purohit, 2019). They harbour the paranoia that if Muslims attain demographic parity with Hindus, they will convert India into an Islamic state as part of the *Ghazwa-e-Hind* campaign.

Hindutva fundamentalists claim that Muslims and Christians should deserve secondary status and treatment in Indian politics and society, and their population growth and political evolution should be monitored with apprehension. They should be socially isolated, economically boycotted, politically underrepresented, and culturally persecuted. Only by restricting their population growth or by assimilating them within Hinduism through homogenisation of their identity, the Hindu nation will be protected. Mehta (2022, pp. 34-35) argues that Hindutva nationalism is against any demographic change as it affects the majority-minority power continuum. Opposition to religious conversion to Islam and Christianity, resistance to interfaith marriages, demands for population control legislation, demand for the expulsion of Muslim immigrants, demand for the re-entry of mainly Hindus from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan through CAA, and *Ghar Wapsi* of Muslims to Hinduism are popularly discussed mechanisms to protect majoritarian hegemony. While a numerical strength helps in winning elections and retaining subsequent political domination, in turn, it helps in curbing any initiatives of resource and power redistribution towards minorities. The 2024 General election showed the BJP's total distrust of Muslims, as only one Muslim candidate was given a ticket by the party to contest the election, and not a single Muslim is holding any ministry in Modi 3.0 (Arnimesh, 2024). The communal hate has reached such an extent that during the recent Israel-Palestine war, many Hindutva nationalists defended the genocide of Palestinians as a rightful treatment given to Muslims by Israeli forces.

The communal hostility between Hindus and Muslims has its origin in the provocative speeches and writings of Tilak. While the concept of Hindutva rose to prominence under Savarkar, RSS, and BJP, one can trace its genesis in the writings of Tilak. Tilak had asserted that:

> The common factor in Indian society is the feeling of *Hindutva*… There may be different doctrines in the Hindu dharma, but certain principles can be found in common, and because of this alone a sort of feeling

> that we belong to one religion has remained among people speaking different languages in such a vast country. This feeling of being one is still alive in different provinces (Wolpert, as quoted in Hasan, 2019, p. 54).

There are certain similarities between Tilak's and Hindutva nationalists' perceptions of Muslims. Tilak propagated Shivaji as a symbol of resistance of the Hindu-Maratha nation to the Mughal rule for its independence, self-respect, and providing direction to the Hindu religion (Hasan, 2019, pp. 53-54). Contemporary Hindutva nationalists' ideational stand is not much different from Tilak's identification of the Indian nation with the Hindus. Both venerate Shivaji and both have associated Muslim rule and Islamic culture with the earliest form of colonialism and projected them as colonial remains which cannot be assimilated into Indian society. Both Tilak and Hindutva nationalists perceive Muslims as a threat to Hindus and as instigators of communal violence. Tilak asserted that friendship lasts between people of equal stature and started to unite Hindus to make them strong enough to live peacefully alongside Muslims (Tahmankar, 1956, p. 56). Similarly, the Hindutva brigade calls for Hindu unity and ideological mobilisation. Tilak had started the Anti-Cow-Killing Society (Tahmankar, 1956, p. 56). By elevating the cow as a sacred symbol of Hindu faith and politicising the beef issue, the Hindutva groups have weaponised the religious sensitivities and exploited fault lines. It was due to Tilak's cultural extremism that many Muslims either left Congress or felt alienated within the organisation. The social boycott of Muslims by the Hindus is advocated by Tilak and Hindutva nationalists. Tilak and the Hindutva ideologues attempted to organise Hindus as a political community against the Muslims, and such attempts not only cultivated hostilities between them but also damaged the harmony which existed between them.

The paranoia about Muslims as anti-social and anti-Hindu elements, which began to form during Tilak's political career, has reached a peak in contemporary years. Islamophobia is both a means and a product of Hindutva's drive for power:

> It is a systematic attack on Muslims to psychologically demoralize, economically destroy, socially isolate, and make them politically irrelevant. This ideological narrative of "othering" is contributing to horrific mass anger which is resulting in lynching after every brief interval and which is capable of generating enough emotional lava to destroy a delicate intercommunal harmony and the cherished ideals of a composite culture (Haque & Khan, 2023, p. 87).

At a later stage of his life, Tilak transformed himself from an anti-muslim communal leader into a leader who worked to build consensus and amity between Congress and the Muslim League. His Democratic Party stood for freedom of religion and secularisation of politics and

nationalism. On the other hand, the BJP initially held, to some extent, a positive approach towards Muslims during the reign of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but since the election of 2014, the scenario of national politics has changed tremendously. While Tilak transformed from a communal to a secular leader over the years, the BJP has become even more sectarian and xenophobic over the years.

Hindutva forces have disseminated the beef issue as beef jihad. Although on the ideological front, the Hindutva government opposes cow slaughter, in the BJP-ruled Goa, the government-run Goa Meat Complex has entered international beef export (Sayed, 2025). Even the sphere of art is affected by saffron politics. The digital vigilantes demand the boycotting of movies found to be critical of Hindu practices and the ruling party. Rather, the Bollywood industry is denounced as Urduwood and accused of Islamification of the audience (Mallick & Goel, 2022). Even the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which has been passed and became the law, is criticised as a politically motivated move to reduce the cultural autonomy of Muslims by bringing the institution under the direct control of the state. In February 2025, the police raided bookstores and publication houses and seized 668 books in Kashmir, most of which were authored by Abul Ala Maududi, a 20th-century Islamic scholar and founder of Jamaat-e-Islami. While the administration called the operation an effort to curtail the spread of unlawful content that could raise communal tensions, the action was criticised as an attack on free speech and dissent (The Associated Press, 2025). The populist discourse in the age of Hindutva is dominated by demands to ban the burqa in public places, prohibit interreligious marriage between Hindus and Muslims (Love Jihad), ban cow slaughter during Eid, prohibit Muslims from running shops near Hindu places of worship and during Hindu festivals, prevent the renting of apartments and residences to Muslims, and bulldoze their properties.

Even the Indian National Congress, which asserts special protection to religious minorities, receives criticisms from right-wingers as a pseudo-secular party. Prime Minister Modi has also been criticised for his sectarian remarks. When he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he referred to Rahul Gandhi as *Shehzada* (prince) and the central government under the Congress as the Delhi Sultanate. These terms were deliberately used to fabricate ‘Muslimisation’ of Congress (Jaffrelot, 2015, p.160). During the 2024 General Election campaigning, Modi tried to galvanise Hindu insecurity when he stated that the Congress party endorses that Muslims have a first right over the nation’s wealth. If Congress wins the election, the country's wealth and people’s (Hindus’) hard-earned money ‘will be distributed among those [Muslims] who have more children. It will be distributed to the infiltrators’ (Ellis-

Petersen, 2024). The Modi government has come under heavy criticism from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN due to the cases of mob lynchings and persecution of Muslims (Mannathukkaren & MacEachern, 2023, p. 2373). Under the banner of 'Love jihad', Muslim men who marry Hindu women are projected as sexual predators. Savarkar had once said that for Muslims, it was their religious duty 'to kidnap and force into their own religion, non-Muslim [Hindu] women. This incited their sensuality and lust for carnage...' (Das, 2006, p. 375).

The Indian film industry is also affected by the saffronisation wave. Since the last decade, there has been a steady rise in the production of movies filled with ultra-nationalism. These movies often depict India as a Hindu nation, historicise the religion, religionise the history, promote islamophobia, and silently cultivate anti-Muslim hatred by depicting Mughals and Muslims as the enemy of the anciently ideal Hindu nation. The othering of Muslims and the silent branding of them as aggressive, terrorists, outsiders, and pro-Pakistani populations occurs openly through such films. While commercial movies passively vilify Muslims, certain films are purposely made to actively present Muslims as wicked people who need to be humiliated and isolated. Some such films include: *The Kashmir Files*, *The Kerala Story*, *Razakar*, *The Sabarmati Report*, *Humare Baarah*, etc. Karmakar and Catterall argued that terms like Dharma and Ram Rajya are often used in movies to present the idea of a strong, stable, and secure nation under a Hindu government. Movies like *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *The Kashmir Files* (2022) have been accused of presenting distorted narratives. The narratives of these movies have been utilised by the BJP to validate its claims of Hindu victimhood and the need for Hindu militancy. *Uri* was used as a campaigning tool during the 2019 general election (Karmakar & Catterall, 2025, pp. 8-9).

While Tagore wanted amity and cooperation between Hindus and Muslims, under the Hindutva rule, communal tensions have increased between the two. In *Ghare Baire*, Tagore has exposed how the irrationality of nationalist politics affects both ordinary Muslims and Hindus alike. Tagore had maintained close relations with Muslim intellectuals. In the age of 'othering' of Muslims, a relook into Tagore's ideational universe would show a path to harmony and brotherhood. Tagore was proudly influenced by Islamic virtues and aspired Persian Culture. He established an Islamic Studies Department and a Chair of Persian Studies at Visva-Bharati University. To inculcate fraternity and the spirit of humanism among students, he would take them to interact with residents of neighbouring villages, who were coincidentally largely Muslims (Quayum, 2025, p.386). He deeply admired medieval Sufi poets, including

Persian poets Saadi and Hafiz, Indian mystic poet Kabir, and Bengali poet Lalon Shah Fakir (Quayum, 2025, pp. 388-389). In times like today, when Islamic culture and traits are stigmatised, one must remember that Tagore, despite being a Hindu, would wear *Jibba* robe associated with Persian culture (Quayum, 2025, p. 389). Tagore cherished Persian literature and Islamic values. During his visit to Iran and Iraq, he lauded Islamic culture in his speeches and highlighted Islam and Muslims' contribution to Indian society (Quayum, 2025, p. 391). In times when Muslims are falsely targeted as terrorists and communal forces, a deep reflection on Tagore's perception shows that he saw Muslims as friendly and social people. Several Muslim intellectuals like Shahidullah, Shahid Suhrawardy, and Abdul Wadud worked as lecturers at Santiniketan (Quayum, 2025, p. 392). In his literature, Tagore painted a humanist portrait of Muslims.

5.6 Masculine Politics and Casteist Hegemony of Nationalism

Most often, the volunteers and foot soldiers of any nationalist campaign belong to the lower classes. They hold a profound conviction that the aspired political change would build a utopian order which would give them, the dominated, vulnerable, and weaker masses, liberty, equality, and justice, which collectively would ensure their individual dignity. Despite the subaltern leaders and reformers denouncing the Indian national movement as elite-led propaganda to preserve caste hegemony and restore traditional hierarchy by retrieving power from the British, a large chunk of the working-class population and women participated in the movement. Nevertheless, the question remains unsettled whether the nationalist discourse and elite leadership consider the emancipation of subalterns as a significant objective of the movement.

Casteism, brahminism, and patriarchy had remained the undercurrent of Tilak's political language. Tilak gave precedence to political reforms over social reforms. He rationalised his disagreement with the primacy of social reformers by arguing that there is no reason to believe that social change is mandatory for the inception of political change. He exemplified that during the Peshwa rule, social transformations were more rampant than ever before in Maharashtra. Had they ruled for some more decades, they would have implemented reforms in familial and social matters. He argued that when the political transformations were occurring in Britain with the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, heading the country towards democracy, their social conditions were not so progressive. Their women were not liberated and were not treated on equal terms. He believed that there is a consensus among

Indians over the question of national independence. Since politics is a matter of the mind and not the heart, organising people to demand self-rule would be effortless. On the other side, the question of social reforms is attached to public sentiments. There is no agreement among people over which social issues require urgent attention. A social revolution would create chaos and disharmony in society. Hence, political reforms demand foremost consideration, and once the swaraj is established, social questions should be taken for discussion (Tilak, 2019, pp. 70-73).

Although Tilak validated his resistance to the social reforms under the pretext that he opposed the distortion of scriptural proclamations, unrestricted interference of the English government into the internal matters of Hindus, anglicisation of Hindus, and neglect of political problems, in truth, he feared social change as a danger to social hegemony and traditionalism which he deeply aspired to protect. Bhagwat & Pradhan (2016, p.108) state that Tilak believed in *varnashrama dharma* and degraded Western individualism. Like a patriarchal spokesperson, he opposed the Age of Consent Bill. Ridiculing the demands for education and empowerment of women, he argued that whether it was Shivaji or the Peshwas, they achieved great with their valour and not with the assistance and aid of girls attending high school. Taking a dig at the demand for increasing the age of marriage for girls, he argued that great leaders like Shivaji, Mahadji Shinde, and Bajirao I were not born to girls who married at the age of twenty-five (Tilak, 2019, p.68). He tried to naturalise the caste divisions by associating them with racial factors and occupational exclusivity. He held that each caste group possesses a distinct quality exclusive to its genes, and therefore, inter-caste marriage should not be initiated. Rather than attempting to create an artificial egalitarian community, people from different castes should form a fraternity by collectively resisting colonialism, as such efforts will develop unity and goodwill among people of different castes, which will automatically outdo caste discrimination (Tilak, 2019, pp.113-116).

Like Tilak, the Hindutva forces attempt to legitimise, naturalise, and normalise caste divisions and caste obligations. Golwalkar criticised the idea of universal education as problematic to his notion of social harmony, which was embedded in caste hierarchy and obligations. He suggested that in the parliamentary democracy of India, the government should be formed through the elections of candidates from respectable professions, which basically means the government of upper caste men. He asserted that democracy and equality are Western materialist and individualist values, which are incompatible with the Indian ethos as they would cause competition between different castes and destroy the social cohesion formed

through *varnavyavastha* (Sarkar, 2024, pp. 165-166). In contemporary India, the BJP is criticised for promoting Brahmin interests and Brahminic ideology through state machinery. Its Hindutva programme, though manifested as oriented towards the collective welfare of the entire Hindu community and promotion of Hindu values, is a clandestine Brahminism. The party is criticised for recruiting people mainly from the Brahmin community for administrative positions under the state, as well as offering ministership to either Brahmin or high caste candidates. The RSS views the Hindu community as a social organism, whose parts have a designated function to perform towards the whole. While the Sangh preaches against the caste hierarchy and caste pride, it rationalises the roles assigned to different caste groups. While Golwalkar saw caste obligations as a work assigned under religion, another RSS ideologue, Govindacharya, asked people to surrender their rights and actively adhere to duties (Saha, 2001, pp. 49-50). They also distrusted democracy for its progressiveness and egalitarianism. Golwalkar asserted that democracy disturbs peace of mind and destroys mutual harmony between individuals. A monarchy is a highly beneficial system which has survived for thousands of years, and only a monarchy can bring peace and prosperity to the people (Sarkar, 2024, pp. 164-165).

The Ayodhya movement, which for long remained in the BJP's election manifesto, had both caste and religious dimensions attached to its political project. While the lawful construction of the Ram temple legitimised the unlawful demolition of the mosque, it also symbolised the victory of cultural lunacy over constitutional morality. While the Babri demolition drive, managed by Brahmins and upper caste elites, used lower caste masses as its foot soldiers in that chaotic situation, it inevitably formed a nominal solidarity between the upper and lower castes necessary for the electoral triumph of the Hindutva party. Even though the superficial unity provided political mileage to the party, it left the social fissures of caste exploitation exposed as before. This outer Hindu unity marginalised Muslims as others against the Hindu majority. During the last decades of the 20th century, the question of OBC reservation increased the hostilities between upper caste and lower caste Hindus. Since the BJP considers the entire Hindu community as its ethno-religious vote bank, it had to stop the widening of caste divisions between the Hindus over the National Front government's decision to implement the OBC reservation based on Mandal's recommendations. At this juncture, the Babri issue helped sideline caste conflicts that erupted over the reservation by uniting Hindus against Muslims (Seshia, 1998, pp. 1042-1043). Like Tilak, the BJP-Sangh politico-cultural ideology of nationalism is strongly rooted in the Hindu idea of India and the upper caste power.

The electoral necessities compelled the BJP to adopt an inclusive approach towards lower castes over the years. However, regarding Muslims, the approach of the BJP has become more exclusivist than before. In its early years, the BJP largely overlooked lower caste, tribal, and Dalit votes. In fact, it tried to secure votes from the Muslim community. During the Vajpayee government, there were a few Muslims promoted to the rank of minister at the centre. They even managed to elect A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, a Muslim scientist, as President of India. Customarily, the party, due to its high caste appeasement and reliance on the upper strata of Hindu society for the votes, opposed caste-based reservation and, in turn, asserted reservation for upper castes based on the criterion of economic backwardness. From 1990 onwards, the BJP started to create space for the lower caste masses in its electoral politics. It started to form coalitions with regional parties centred around OBCs, and in later years, it began to directly appeal for OBC votes by offering tickets to OBC candidates and indirectly supporting recommendations of the Mandal Commission, which Jaffrelot called indirect mandalisation (Jaffrelot, 2000, p. 105). While this was the BJP's tactic to harvest votes of those classes which do not abide by Hindutva nationalism of upper castes, from the perspective of the RSS, it was a part of their larger policy to unite all Hindus transcending the caste identities and consolidate them as an organised religious community with uniform political orientations and voting preferences favourable to Hindutva ideology. The statistics of the 2019 General elections to the Lok Sabha show that:

> …37.2% of the BJP's Lok Sabha MPs were OBC, 14.1% ST and 17.4% SC. This meant that 68.9% (209) of its 303 Lok Sabha MPs elected in 2019 were non-upper-caste, and from castes that were traditionally considered lower down in the caste hierarchy (Mehta, 2021).

During the 2024 general election, the BJP offered tickets to diverse social groups. Of them, 43 % belonged to the general category, 27% belonged to the OBC category, 17% were from the SC category, while 10 % belonged to the ST category. Only 2 % tickets were offered to minority communities (Acharya, 2024).

Since Hindutva nationalism and the BJP face strong resistance from the Muslim community, the BJP decided to opt for a change in its political strategy. Since the 2014 General Election, it has made certain decisions towards SCs and STs that could significantly increase its vote share. They made a paradigm shift by deciding to completely compromise on Muslim votes by targeting SCs and STs as their new vote bank. To appease them and make them consider the BJP as a favourable party, Ram Nath Kovind and later Droupadi Murmu were elected to the post of President of India. While Kovind belonged to the SC community, Murmu

belonged to the ST community. Despite these ostentatious changes, the party is still largely dominated by upper castes. 76 % of office bearers of the party at the national level belong to the upper caste, and around 60% of its national executive come from the general category. 65% of its state-level party presidents and district unit presidents are from the general category. The party has a very poor representation of SC, ST, and Muslims in its decision-making bodies at the national, state, and district levels. Even the OBC are underrepresented (Tewari & Kaushika, 2018). Although the party proudly claims itself a Hindu party, its power-distribution formula exposes its upper-caste inclinations. While Tagore spoke about the empowerment of the subalterns, like Tilak, the BJP is occupied with retaining caste hegemony. Christophe Jaffrelot and Verniers note that since the new wave of Hindutva nationalism started to blow in India by 2009 and became severe by 2014, the representation of upper castes has increased while OBC representation has eroded in the parliament (Sagar, 2019). Like Tilak, the BJP wants the decision-making positions to be dominated predominantly by the Savarna class.

Like Tilak, the BJP and Modi understand the significance and transformative potential inherent in middle-class political mobilisation. Jaffrelot (as cited in Chacko, 2018, p. 555) argues that the neo-middle class, which consists of the OBC population shifted to urban and semi-urban centres, left their traditional occupations and employed themselves in the low-waged informal sector or pursued self-employment. It is a dichotomous community which is both modern and conventional, and rural and urban. Despite originating from lower castes, they have adopted upper-caste practices for better social mobility. To receive electoral support from them, Modi emphasised his OBC background, tea-seller childhood, and self-made leadership. Jal (2015, pp. 537-538) argues that since the Hindutva ideology has entered the formal structures of governance, there has been a steady revival of upper-caste dictatorship. The caste-based dictatorship and social slavery are carried out through caste-centric village panchayats, fascist organisations, and institutions of liberal democracy. Muslims, as enemies of the Hindu nation and Dalits, as hereditary labourers, are widely subjected to socioeconomic exploitation, and the liberal state fails not only to protect them but also to determine the cause of the exploitation.

The BJP looks at SCs and OBCs as its potential vote bank. It uses strategies like othering of Muslims to break the Muslim-Dalit brotherhood and include the latter into the Hindu vote bank. This superficial political inclusion does not affect or change social realities rooted in caste pride. Yet even minor Dalit-Muslim skirmishes are dramatised as Hindu-Muslim hostilities, expecting Dalits to combat Muslims by upholding a Hindu posture. For

Dalits, the choice is between an assertive and angry majority of Hindus and a subjugated, stigmatised, and hunted Muslim minority (Maclean, 1999, pp. 490-491). If they bond with Muslims for political assertion and social liberation by challenging the Hindu system, the socially excluded will also be excluded from the 'nation' and accused of treachery. Although not fully convinced of the Hindutva revolution, the lower castes embrace it to experience some form of social mobility and temporarily transcend their low-caste status (Nandy et al., 1995, as cited in Maclean, 1999, p. 491). The BJP seeks to attain dialectical synthesis by amalgamating Ambedkar's ideas with Hindutva thought. While Ambedkar was a hardcore denouncer of Brahminical nationalism, which the BJP upholds, to gain Dalit votes, the BJP misconstrues Ambedkar's ideas and presents him as a Hindutva thinker (Maclean, 1999, p. 499). Besides gaining Dalit votes, the Hindutvisation of Ambedkar helps in the constitutionalising of Hindutva. Traditional Hinduism expelled the untouchables from its fourfold system. To pull them into political Hinduism and retain the Hindu demographic strength, goddesses such as Bharat Mata have been engineered. This goddess blurs the distinction between religion and politics and provides untouchables with nominal unity with caste Hindus (Maclean, 1999, pp. 496-497). Besides Ambedkar, other subaltern heroes, including those who opposed upper-caste oppression and the Brahminical system, were presented as Hindu nationalist heroes. Some of them include: Suheldeo, Baldeo, and Daldeo of Pasi Rajbhar caste, Ravidas and Supach Rishi of Jatav community, Dina-Bhadri of Musahar community, Lorik Yadav of Ahir community, and Vallabhbhai Patel of Kurmi community (Narayan, 2021, pp. 61-62).

Contemporary politics is also known for the masculinisation of public spaces. While Tagore's literature presents women as empowered, courageous, and rational humans, projecting his feminist perspectives, Tilak remained a patriarchal nationalist. Although the BJP does not present itself as an anti-women party, it is mildly patriarchal in nature. Hindu patriarchal nationalism and the nationalisation of Hindu patriarchy are interrelated phenomena which rest on the controlling and subjugation of women and territory under the disguise of protection and consecration. Hindu nationalism treats upper-caste women as vulnerable to Muslim vulgarity and emphasises that they should be taught national politics of alienation of Muslims, as the former is the custodian of national honour. Nevertheless, it primarily stands for the domination of female sexuality under patriarchy (Das, 2006, pp. 371-372).

The persona of women within the Hindutva discourse is both passive and aggressive. It glorifies chastity associated with womanhood, sanctifies her role in managing the family, and personifies her as a living embodiment of honour. By engaging them as volunteers of the

Hindutva revolution, the party promotes aggression among Hindu women towards Muslim men, which ironically, is contrary to their socio-political image as a feminine and passive gender. While RSS-BJP celebrates 'women from the epic literature who embody notions of suffering and forbearance, it also celebrates brave and powerful women who use violence if necessary to protect their communities' (Basu, 1993, p. 32). The BJP speaks radically about empowering Muslim women by liberating them from the oppression of Muslim law, triple talaq, and burqa compulsion, however, it has remained largely silent on socio-cultural discrimination and oppression faced by Hindu women, especially Dalit women. The BJP, being a nationalist party adhering to social conservatism, has been found holding a paradoxical stand on women's demands. Basu (1993, p. 33) argues that the idea of the nation as an extended family inevitably represents the centralisation of power and decision-making, patriarchal norms and supremacy of manhood, and gender roles inside and outside the home, wherein women should be submissive or inferior to men. Mridula Sinha, the then national president of the BJP's women's wing, argued that the liberation of women stands for their liberation from atrocities; liberation and women's empowerment do not mean the liberation of women from household duties as wives and mothers.

Hindutva forces consider Hindu girls as immediate prey to Muslim men who marry them only to forcibly convert them to Islam as part of Love Jihad. The Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, which was passed in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh in 2020, was criticised for providing an easy mode for the government to criminalise Muslim men who marry Hindu women. On the other hand, the Hindutva ideology supports the *Ghar Wapasi* of Muslim women by encouraging their marriage with Hindu men (Kadiwal, 2023, p. 744). This ideological discourse and legal framework objectify women under patriarchal-Brahminical Hindutva nationalism. During the Sabarimala temple issue, the BJP projected a conservative and patriarchal stand when it opposed the decision of the Supreme Court to allow women of all ages to visit Kerala's Sabarimala temple (Saberin, 2018). As per the traditions, women of menstruating age (10-50) were prevented from visiting the temple. Hindutva is a conservative discourse, and its anti-feminist narrative is a part of the Hindu Rashtra campaign, which believes in hypermasculine nationalism (Sen & Jha, 2024, p. 2). Despite its periodic gender-neutral assertions, Hindutva's militant nationalism, masculine politics, patriarchal morality, and articulation of manhood as protector, decision-maker, and provider present the socio-political sphere as men's business. Sen & Jha (2024, p. 5) argue that PM Modi, by declaring Rs. 100 reductions on LPG cylinders as a 'gift' to Indian women on International Women's

Day, had reestablished the gender binary and belief that a woman's life is limited to household duties, especially the kitchen.

Hindutva nationalism has defined nationalism, politics, and public spaces as exclusive masculine zones, which require people with courage, pride, masculinity, rationality, and sacrificial mentality, which, as per social norms, represents manhood contrary to womanhood, which is docile, fragile, irrational, and overly emotional. The same approach made people look at Modi, who boasted of possessing a 56-inch chest, as a saviour against humble and soft-spoken Manmohan Singh. During the 2014 General Elections:

> …Modi was stereotypically put forth by the BJP, as an alpha, macho, superman who could instil fear in his enemies by making them quiver and most importantly, the one who could swiftly work to solidify the Hindu identity and ideology (Nigam, as quoted in "BJP And Feminism", 2019)

The status of Hindu women within the Hindutva creed is paradoxical. While it highlights them as a cadre of the Hindu Rashtra project by providing them with a political platform, its socially conservative position emphasises traditional gender roles, thus delaying the liberation and empowerment of women. Likewise, while patriarchal nationalism places them subordinate to Hindu men, it elevates them above Muslim men. Pande (2022, p. 413) argues that Hindutva blames Westernisation for the decline of Hindu culture. By reviving the Hindu womanhood, both family and nation will be reinstated. Such rhetoric not only hampers the social emancipation of women but, by glorifying the old social order, not influenced by European ideals of liberty and equality, prevents women from recognising the root of their subordination. Thus, the victims participate in the activism that desires to restore the system that facilitates their victimisation. Nationalism catalyses the masculinisation of politics by imposing on women the role of '…heroic mother, the chaste wife and the celibate masculinized warrior' (Pande, 2022, p.415).

Tilak used Shivaji to represent the masculine nature of the anti-colonial struggle. Vivekananda asked men to shun their woman-like traits and embrace manliness, and he advocated masculine spirituality. Like Tilak, Savarkar glorified Shivaji as a symbol of masculine Hinduism and aspired for the militarisation of Hinduism (Banerjee, 2006, pp. 66-67). Tagore's compassionate Hinduism and humanist pacifism were contrary to them; as to them, pacifism and non-aggression were signs of weakness and disgrace. Similar glorification of martial mentality exists in Hindutva discourse inside and outside the government. Whether it is Modi speaking of his 56-inch chest or Home Minister Amit Shah saying '*Jaan de denge iske liye'* (we will die for it) for Kashmir (Nagpal, 2019), they signalled that glory exists in

belligerence. The women within the Hindutva ideology are viewed either as warriors on the battlefield, monks with a masculine-strong will, or housewives and mothers assisting their husbands and sons in holy war. Rastra Sevika Samiti, Durga Vahini, and Sadhvi Shakti Parishad are the women's wings of Hindutva nationalist organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bajrang Dal, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The narratives which became popular during the 19th century, asserting that Hindus remained subject to colonisation, genocide, and exploitation for centuries due to their peace-loving and renunciatory mentality, have encouraged Hindus in postcolonial India to join these right-wing institutions and legitimise their role as protectors of the Hindus and the Hindu nation.

Although the Hindutva organisations advocate the masculinisation of women, they, as well as the women cadre, have often remained evasive on the questions of familial patriarchy and social patriarchy. Sarkar (1993, p. 19) argues that the women's brigade of Hindutva has remained committed to the ideology of Hindutva nationalism and usually deliberates on the superficial question of strengthening the Hindu nation, which offers them a nominal, limited, and self-aggrandising political identity. Despite their exposure to the public sphere, they do not concentrate on the questions pertaining to gender issues, patriarchal hegemony, and the victimisation of women. Instead of discussing the exploitation of Hindu women inside the community and within the family, the attention is diverted to discussing the exploitation of women by Muslims in the past or by Muslims in the present through Love Jihad. While the former is inconsequential dialogue, the latter is a hyperbolic allegation. Williams (2022, p. 163) argues that since 2014, the BJP has significantly increased the number of its women candidates, but the party has yet to move from increasing numerical representation of women to substantive consideration of their interests.

Even in contemporary India, where women are looked down upon as an inferior gender, a look at Tagore's literature shows that Tagore held a progressive view of women. Though Tagore was not a feminist as per contemporary standards, he was way ahead of his time. The women he portrayed in his stories were not submissive and predictable. Rather, they were rebels who challenged the gender role imposed on women. They were complex characters who stood beyond the binary of men and women. In his work, *Chitrangada* (1892) 'Tagore challenges the traditional binary of masculine and feminine, suggesting that identity is not fixed but rather fluid and performative. Chitrangada's journey is one of self-discovery, as she learns to embrace both her masculine and feminine qualities' (Sen, 2025, p. 2). *Chitrangada* contextualises the modern notion of gender plurality and complex personality. Like other

multifaceted women characters in Tagore's literature, Bimala from *Ghare-Baire* is hanging between traditionality and modernity and nationalism and universal humanism. Tagore drew a parallel between Sita of *Ramayana* and Bimala of *Ghare-Baire,* showing how they evolve to be competent personalities. 'Sita in *The Ramayana* and Bimala in *The Home and the World* are allegorically categorized with specific Hindu construction of women either as the agent of change, of reform or of revolution' (Banerjee, 2021, p. 6). Tagore's ideal woman is socially outspoken, mentally modern, politically humanist, and individually unique. His ideal woman is self-capable, who is self-consciously moving to challenge patriarchal norms and liberate herself. In *Chokher Bali* (1903), Tagore projected two opposite natures of women. While Asha was an innocent and submissive wife, Binodini was an educated, intelligent, and assertive widow. Yet, patriarchal norms bring suffering and injustice to their lives (Dash, 2024, p. 10). Tagore's women characters show emotional as well as intellectual depth and maturity. They represent the complexities of human nature and openly embrace their virtues and vices. While patriarchal literature expects women to strictly remain limited to the feminine submissive role of chaste wives, Tagore offered them the liberty to be who they are.

5.7 Hindu Revivalism and National Hero: Shift from Shivaji to Ram

A community always requires a patriarchal figure, a hero, regardless of its historical authenticity, to experience itself as one big family having common ancestry and history. Where true ethnicity is absent, such legends help the plural community to imagine itself as an ethnic group. The admired hero has to have a larger-than-life presence, a masculine physique and character, expertise in using weaponry, and gallantry to fight evil. Tilak built such a machismo around Shivaji as the protector of Hindu culture. He visualised Shivaji as an army commander fully dedicated to combating the attack of the Mughals on the Hindu community. Such legendary narratives are formed for two reasons. Firstly, to unite people as children of the patriarch. Secondly, to advance heroic courage in them to fight the enemy and retain the legacy of their hero. While the historical and the geographical context of the Marathi region compelled Tilak to choose Shivaji as the symbol of heroism, the religio-cultural background of Hindutva nationalism convinced the BJP to idolise Lord Ram as the symbol of rebellion against the miscreants to establish dharma. Ram represents a fusion of divine and humane, duty over rights, synthesis of material and spiritual, moral uprightness, adherence to *varnashrama dharma*, etc. These traits perfectly match the Hindutva politics (Singh, 2024).

The controversial Ram Janmabhoomi Rathyatra of 1990, which gained prominence as part of the campaign for the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the electoral victory of the BJP, was nothing less than a march of troops towards communal carnage. While the popular imagery of Lord Ram depicts him standing gracefully with his brother Laxman and his consort Sita on either side of him with Hanuman sitting near his feet, the portrait of Ram used during the *rathyatra* had depicted him as a warrior King holding bow and arrow, ready to combat. The *rath* or chariot used in such processions symbolised Arjuna's chariot on the battlefield of Kurukshetra (Veer, 1994, cited in Corbridge & Harriss, 2003, p. 188). The initial years of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement also collided with the broadcasting of Ramayana on the state-owned television channel Doordarshan, which not only refreshed the glory of Rama in collective imagination but also created vehemence among Hindus necessary to validate Ram Janmabhoomi movement from religious, cultural, and political perspectives. Most Hindus might not have comprehended the Ramayana serial the way Sangh would have wanted them to, but it definitely played a crucial role in normalising and secularising the movement from the context of Indian politics (Rajagopal, cited in Corbridge & Harriss, 2003, p. 190). It convinced people that the Ram temple construction was a genuine responsibility of the government. Ram became the focal point where secular and sacred meet.

Sentiments of nationalism have a close resemblance with the sentiments of ultimate triumph, eternal achievement, a war against evil and injustice, the assimilation of earthly and heavenly, and the dawn of a new order, which is equally ancient. In the Maratha region of the Tilak, Shivaji was the most suitable persona to organise people, as the legacy of his martial bravery and his sense of righteousness was admired by elites and subalterns alike. Several decades later, the BJP succeeded in cultivating populist sentiments and stigmatising the secular nature of the Indian republic through the strategy of idolising a national hero. The political entry of Ram did not sideline Shivaji. While the rhetoric of Ram has been widely used in the Hindi belt since the 1990s, since 2014, the icon of Shivaji has been popularly used in Maharashtra, Goa, and Karnataka by the Hindutva party to eulogise militant nationalism (Bachchhav, 2025). Whether it is Shivaji or Ram, both these symbols are used from a cultural context to establish the primordiality and religiosity of the nation, alienate Muslims, and codify India as a Hindu land. The aggressive usage of Shivaji and Ram in the political language of the country petrified Indian Muslims, who perceive it as a tectonic shift in the synthetic secular character of the country. The projection of Ram and Shivaji in a ready-to-combat position sought to tell the Muslims that Hindus are mentally and physically prepared to confront them

if they offend the Hindus. While the historians interpreted Ram and Shivaji as non-sectarian heroes, Hindutva nationalists have repeatedly presented them as prodigies of the Hindu community alone.

While Tilak manifested Shivaji as a Kshatriya king who was guided and advised by Brahmins, Ram has been presented as a Kshatriya king dedicated to the implementation of varnashrama dharma and the protection of Brahmins. While for Phule, Shivaji was *Kulvadi Bhushan*, for Tilak, Shivaji was *gobrahmanpratipalak* or protector of cows and Brahmins. Hindutva nationalists demonstrate Shivaji as a Hindu nationalist and ardent hater of Islam and Muslims. Although Shivaji was against Mughal rule, he was not anti-Muslim per se. His Hindavi Swaraj was inclusive and tolerant in contrast to the Hindutva bigotry of the present times. Several Muslims enjoyed prominent ranks in his army and administration. Darya Sarang Daulat Khan was the leader of his naval force. Madari Mehtar was his personal bodyguard. Siddi Hilal and his son Siddi Wahwah fought on Shivaji's side. Noor Khan Beg was his chief of infantry. Several Muslim sardars and soldiers were part of Shivaji's army (Pansare, 2019, pp. 59-60).

Economic inequality and developmental backwardness construct a favourable environment for the advancement of populist politics. Amid the existential absurdity of the modern age, people crave a raison d'être to keep their minds occupied and energy dedicated in pursuit of a collective identity. Nationalist ideology encircling culture and religion, and fostering a sense of vulnerability, supplies people with a guiding principle. The worship of a national hero, who is both human and divine at the same time and with whom the masses can associate easily, functions optimally within the domain of nationalism. The masses can be made to think, act, and react in a specific manner when fear, suspicion, and vulnerability are stimulated within them. The Ram temple movement cultivated righteous indignation among certain sections of Hindus, exploited public sentiments, halted reason, and nurtured populist politics. The BJP used the Ram temple issue to polarise votes on religious lines. The call for historical reparation and restorative justice contributed to the electoral victory of the party (Lodhi, 2024). While the secular electoral manifesto stresses the material security of the people, a communal manifesto and movements put emphasis on the protection of culture, where the satisfaction of the collective ego surpasses the satisfaction of material needs.

Since ancient times, the legacy and persona of Ram have been manifested in diverse ways. He was a compassionate Ram who ate berries offered by the low caste Shabari and who

sacrificed the throne and lived in the forest for twelve years in obedience to his father's word. But the Hindutva discourse has often depicted him as a Kshatriya warrior on duty. He is portrayed as choosing combat over compromise and dialogue, and aggression over pacifism. Such mainstreaming of power and aggressiveness, accompanied by religious fundamentalism, persuades people to disdain the ideals of non-violence and secularism. For Tagore, Ram should be a role model for Indian men. Ram also respected public opinion, something a democratically elected government must do. Ram, as an ideal human, embraced Guhaka, a chandala caste person, as his friend (Chatterjee, 2022). The Ram temple-Babri mosque issue not only communalised Indian politics and ignited animosity between the Hindus and Muslims, but it also infused the public conscience with sectarian interests over collective good. The Hindutva forces had often presented the mosque as a proudly standing symbol of the collective humiliation of Hindus till the construction of the Ram temple began in 2020.

Lal Krishna Advani, regarding the temple issue, had argued that the temple issue '…is not just a legal issue, nor is it merely a question of history. It is essentially a question of a nation's identity. Whom must this nation identify with, Ram or Babur?' (Wariavwalla, 2000, p. 594). The choice between Ram and Babur is the choice between Hindus and Muslims as the rightful heir of India. The Ram temple construction epitomised restoring the lost glory of Hinduism and erasing collective disgrace by undoing historical wrongs. Wariavwalla (2000, p. 595) argues that the television series Ramayana, aired between 1987-88, helped people to 'imagine community'. During the catastrophe of the first wave of COVID-19, when the stigmatising terminology 'Corona Jihad' was already getting associated with Indian Muslims who were publicised as enemies of the nation, the central government of India decided to re-telecast the television series Mahabharat and Ramayan on Doordarshan. Although the decision had no anti-Muslim agenda, it contributed to the rationalisation of a binary depicting heroic Hindus and anti-social Muslims.

For an ordinary Hindu, the temple issue was less a matter of faith and more about satisfying the communal ego. The demolition of the mosque provided them with a space and opportunity to remove their everyday frustration. The temple-related sensationalised news added much-needed drama to their otherwise pale life. Teaching a lesson to Muslims and humiliating them was the undercurrent of the Ram temple movement. During the early days of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement:

> The Rath yatra was preceded by a sustained ideological propaganda through print and visual media to implant the image of an angry Ram in popular mind. In contrast to his traditional tranquil, compassionate

> and benevolent image, the posters and books circulated by the *sang parivar* depicted Rama riding a Rath and 'pulling his bow string, the arrow poised to annihilate'. In some pictures he was even carrying a *trishul*, a sword, and an axe (Panikkar, 1993, p. 70).

While the Ram temple issue represented justice through cultural revivalism and undoing historical wrongs, Modi's demagoguery of himself as the face of socio-economic justice and voice of the downtrodden has elevated him to a stature second only to Ram. Due to the years of deliberation on the construction of the Ram temple, the persona of Modi and the legacy of Ram merged in the public conscience, creating a divine aura around Modi, which blurred the line between politics and religion. During the campaigning for the 2024 General election, while giving an interview to News18, Modi stated 'Till my mother was alive, I had the impression that perhaps my birth was a biological one. After her demise, when I view after assimilating all the experiences, I am convinced that God has sent me' (Yadav, 2024).

The Ram Temple may not be seen as an isolated issue that has ended with the inauguration of the Ram Temple in 2024. Rather, the temple construction symbolises the beginning of the restoration process, which aims to reclaim everything which is alleged to belong to Hindus. It is also a cultural purification and homogenisation process, as the Muslim community is often depicted as cruel, meat-eating, and ghastly creatures who malign the virtue and positivity of the Hindus. Hence, the purification of India lies in the eradication of Islamic culture. The employment of religious symbols helps the political elites project bogus egalitarian relations with the lower-class masses. Such symbols, idioms, memoirs, and political language are regularly used in speeches to keep the complex sense of fear, anger, and power intact among the Hindus. It gets repeatedly claimed that one day Muslims will enslave Hindus and eliminate their culture. Hence, saffronisation is shown as the best policy to establish Ram Rajya. Since the last decade, across various parts of India, statues of Ram and Shivaji have been erected in public places, often showing them in a combat position. These sites are protected with great zeal by middle-class and lower-class youth, employed or otherwise. The Hindutva ideologues have imprinted it on the Hindu mind that only when the secular state is replaced by the Hindu state and Hindus prioritise communal interests over collective welfare by severing ties with Muslims, will Hindus be truly safe in India (Mehta, 2022, p. 36).

Tagore held different views on lord Ram. His Ram was not a political figure, but an ideal man who represented peace and inclusiveness. In times like today, when religion has become a deadweight of ritualism, a marker of identity, and a fuel of electoral politics, all we need to understand and embrace is Tagore's notion of religion as being one with the infinite,

after which there remains no wall of caste, creed, religion, or nation (Pathak, 2020). Similarly, in today's India, the religiosity of persons is subject to their dietary habits, in the sense that a non-vegetarian person is perceived to be not purely religious and spiritual. Tagore dismissed this absurdity a century ago when he dismissed the notion that suppressing one's natural instincts (*pravritti*) by abstinence (*nivritti*) contributes to spiritual growth (Sen, 2020). Tagore opposed centrality and singularity, not only in the form of a nation but also in the imagination of God. For him idea of God is a much personal affair, and each one is free to pursue it the way he deems fit. In his Ramrajya, each one seeks his or her kind of Ram. According to Tagore, in the diverse land of India and the plural terrain of Hinduism, all have liberty to choose from and believe in existing sets of Ramayanas. Tagore inherently believes in plurality of expression and imagination in the field of faith, where each one can have their different Ram without hurting others' notion of Ram (Ray, 2021). This stand of Tagore contrasts Hindutva's unidimensional definition of Ram, wherein any kind of differences from the 'truth' perceived by the ruling class are objected.

5.8 Nationalist Supremacy and Universal Guru

Prime Minister Nehru was highly optimistic about the emergence of a democratic and liberal international order. He aspired for India's amicable relations with other nations and carved out a humanitarian foreign policy for India as opposed to a policy that uncompromisingly pursues national interests alone. He was deeply influenced by Tagore's championing of universal humanism, interdependence of the East and the West, and his denunciation of hyper-nationalism and colonialism. Chatterjee & Das (2021, pp. 568-569) argue that Nehru, inspired by Tagore and Gandhi, imagined India as a syncretic civilisation cherishing cultural hybridity, social plurality, and liberal governance. Like Tagore, he attempted a vertical amalgamation of the ancient idea of Advaita monism and modern scientific liberalism, as well as the horizontal amalgamation of East and West. Inspired by Tagore's humanism, Nehru aspired for friendly relations between India and the world to foster mutual respect and symbiotic living. Nehru preferred idealism over realism and faith over scepticism. Nehru's democratic ethos and his strict adherence to secular and liberal nationalism helped him promote multiculturalism, tolerance, egalitarianism, individualism, decolonialism, peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and scientific temperament, both domestically and internationally. However, the Hindutva

nationalism of the BJP is partially incompatible with the Nehruvian principles. Modi's foreign policy, unlike Tagore's faith in altruistic internationalism, asserts 'India First' (Meghe, 2024).

The BJP-Hindutva worldview defines India in terms of ethnic civilisation and aspires for a strong and homogenous state; its foreign policy is inspired by hidden aggressiveness, national interests, and a superpower outlook. Rather, Modi's authoritarian working style in domestic and external politics is analogous to the recent global phenomenon wherein populist-authoritarian leaders are coming to power across different countries, yet through democratic elections. Contrary to Nehru's utopian hope of nuclear disarmament and Tagore's idealism of universal pacifism, Vajpayee, the first PM of the BJP alliance (NDA), adopted a pragmatic approach and made India a nuclear-weapon state in 1998 with the Pokhran-II nuclear test. Chatterjee and Das (2021, p. 577) observe that in Vajpayee's opinion, only by establishing its nuclear status, India would have better bargaining power at the international level. Any form of soft diplomacy and non-confrontational foreign policy based on moral and ethical considerations meant weakness. A shift in India's foreign policy approach from idealism to pragmatism during Vajpayee's tenure has been described as crossing the Rubicon (Raj Mohan, 2003, cited in Verma & Sahoo, 2024, p. 173). The peak of this masculinisation process occurred when, despite the threats of international sanctions, the government decided to conduct a Pokhran-II nuclear test at the cost of making India a pariah state. While Tagore criticised militarism and considered dialogue and cross-cultural engagement as a moral imperative to foster collaborative and symbiotic living, the Hindutva government believes in militarisation as a potent mechanism to achieve national interests. In times when world organisations are working towards nuclear disarmament and addressing the danger of the nuclear race, Vajpayee's decision to conduct a nuclear test despite opposition projects preferring counter-normative nuclear assertion over continental peace.

The same doctrine of militarised nationalism has been continued by Modi after coming to power in 2014. The BJP, which strongly believes in militarisation and muscular diplomacy, has often ridiculed Nehru's passive and moral diplomacy. Contrary to India's conventional defensive approach to military operations, Modi has favoured overt operations when it comes to handling skirmishes on the India-Pakistan border. Choudhary (2024) argues that since 2014, India has proceeded towards strong military modernisation. Modi's vision to build India as a military-industrial superpower explains the ongoing process of military modernisation, whose core objectives are stated in 20 reforms mentioned in a booklet, released in 2021 by then Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The military modernisation under Modi aims at improving

the defence system to combat complex security challenges, promoting foreign policy using military capability, reforming arms acquisition policy, fostering the defence industrial ecosystem, etc. Simultaneously, there has been a significant increase in the defence budget of India since the nationalist party formed the government. India has also moved towards space militarisation through its Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Missile Test 'Mission Shakti' in 2019 (PIB Delhi, 2020). India established the Chief of Defence Staff in 2019. While Tagore's denouncement of militarised nationalism also expresses his aspirations for de-militarisation and re-humanisation of the world order, the policies of the current ultra-nationalist government of India are promoting militarisation at all costs. Unlike Gandhi and Tagore, who believed that only non-violence could foster peace, security, and harmony, the Hindutva party argues that security can be ensured only through military might, and idealism has no relevance in foreign policy.

The idea of India as Vishwaguru (world teacher) has remained an irreplaceable aspect of India's foreign policy since independence. India's labelling of itself as Vishwaguru is founded on the assumption that India is a spiritual superpower and the epitome of sagacity, and by virtue of that, India has a moral obligation to play a significant role in resolving the challenges threatening humanity, and consequently, India shall lead the world on the path of righteousness and happiness. The Vishwaguru doctrine has significantly shaped India's national philosophy and foreign policy since the last century. The title became globally known after Vivekananda propagated the image of India and Hinduism as a spiritual lighthouse, which should guide humanity towards harmony and inner awakening. This self-acknowledgement as a Vishwaguru had originated from the German Indologists' interpretation of ancient Sanskrit texts as the encyclopaedia of wisdom, philosophical inquiry, and ethical learning. This European accreditation immediately provided Indians, initially suffering from colonial inferiority, an excellent opportunity to strongly assert India's intellectual superiority and moral righteousness to secure a respectable position in the hierarchy of nations. This grandiosity encouraged the 19th and 20th-century Indian nationalists to divide all spaces in the binary of spiritual domain and material domain (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 6). This positioning of India as the cradle of universal morality and guardian of righteousness was later promulgated by Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Tagore, and it has continued to shape Indian foreign policy since independence. Sullivan de Estrada (2023, p. 437) asserts

> that the socially superior self-positioning of the *vishwaguru* promises a remedy to the recognition deficits that emerge through state-level identification processes; can conjure a powerful discourse around which to

> mobilize groups politically; and may provide a measure of ontological security at the level of the individual. This is precisely because the *guru* or teacher, as well as occupying a venerated and superior social position, holds the potential to deliver normative transformation within the student(s), remaking the very terms of recognition.

The narrative of India as a Vishwaguru has received new attention since the rise of the BJP to power in 2014. The party asserts that promoting Indic spirituality is one of the objectives of the government. While the Hindutva government claims that India's Vishwaguru position is a moral responsibility towards the world, critics argue that the title Vishwaguru offers infallible repute to the government and provides it with an inbuilt immunity from all forms of criticism from within and outside the country. While on the outer side, the RSS-BJP declares Vishwaguru as a guardian role of India, their ideologues since the early years perceive it as a revivalist policy. According to them, initially, the whole world was following the Hindu way of life before it got overshadowed by Christianity and Islam (Noorani, 2021) and therefore, now the time has come to promote the Hindu way of life across the world. The Hindutva government has retained India's mission as Vishwaguru in its foreign policy, but it is deeply influenced by the principles of Hindutva rather than liberalism and humanism. In the name of Vishwaguru, it attempts 'the triumph of Hindutva at home and its acquiescence internationally' (Noorani, 2021).

While in general policy of expansionism attempts territorial acquisition, the contemporary Vishwaguru paradigm attempts ideological expansionism. The Hindutva government, infused with Brahminic culinary supremacy, wants to promote vegetarianism inside and outside India. Instead of respecting the dietary freedom of people and acknowledging the meat-eating history of India, 'vegetarianism is being weaponised by the right' (Vikram Doctor, as quoted in Alluri, 2022). During the G20 Summit organised in India in September 2023, the food offered to world leaders and delegates at the G20 gala dinner hosted by President Droupadi Murmu was exclusively vegetarian (Shiraz, 2023). While the dinner offered diverse vegetarian delicacies of India to world leaders to try, when observed from the Hindutva lens, it was an attempt to reaffirm the notion of *sattvic* (purity) attached to the various dimensions of *Bharatiya* civilisation of which food is one. From one perspective, it is a symbolic leap towards encouraging the global community to move towards vegetarianism as a salubrious form of food necessary for a healthy life. It also advocates practising compassion towards animals, which is mentioned as a fundamental duty in the Indian Constitution and, from the Gandhian sense, the adoption of food-based non-violence. The soft

imposition of vegetarianism reflects the government's attempt to glorify upper caste dietary practices as civilised ideals and stigmatise non-vegetarianism as barbaric. While vegetarian food is associated with *Sattvic* qualities such as calmness of mind, intelligence, compassion, and self-control, a meat-based diet is thought to promote *Tamasic* qualities such as anger, violence, cruelty, ignorance, laziness, and depression. When observed from the prism of the Hindutva homogenisation push, it is an attempt to diminish the culinary diversity of India, demonise the meat-based diet, and project a sense of purity and superiority associated with the Aryan-Brahmin class due to their plant-based diet. The religious nationalism of the BJP and Sangh Parivar astutely uses the meat-based food practices of Muslims to build a narrative around them as aggressive and uncultured masses with barbaric food habits, making them unsuitable for assimilation within Indian society.

Modi's foreign policy focuses on asserting the primordial and Hindu identity of India. It aspires for international recognition of the prehistoric civilizational identity of India, that is Bharat, beyond the idea of India as just one of the decolonised Asian societies. Shifting away from the conventional status of India as a spiritual soft power, Modi's foreign policy aspires to build India into a regional superpower. The Modi doctrine of foreign policy highlights: 'India first; neighbourhood first; overcoming historic hesitations; from Rule-taker to Rule-maker: Indian diaspora; and strengthening cultural ties' (Chaturvedi, 2017, cited in Kinnvall, 2019, p. 290). Contrary to Tagore's vision of Visva-Bharati, which stands for cultural exchange, cooperative collaboration, and global interdependence, where India, in its spiritual and material capacity, contributes to the collective emancipation of humanity and still receives the best from others, Hindutva's conception of *Akhand Bharat* or Undivided India resonates with India's expansionist policy in South Asia. The idea of Akhand Bharat is rooted in Hindutva rhetoric, which conceptualises India as a civilizational nation-state and regards most of its modern-day neighbouring countries as territories of the primordial homeland. Consequently, the utopia of restoring and reviving the Hindu nation would end only after reuniting these territories with India. In 2023, in the newly inaugurated building of the Indian parliament, the BJP government installed a mural depicting Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bhutan as part of a greater undivided India. 'The imagery of Akhand Bharat carries the sentiment of past Hindu glory, a feeling of victimhood, and a resolve to reclaim the space' (Das, 2023). Although the government declared the mural as a cultural depiction and not any expansionist agenda, such endeavours could generate suspicions, alarm security concerns, and harm India's relations with its neighbours. It also discards current geo-political realities and,

by visualising the ancient pre-Islamic character of the region, totally rejects the significance of Islamic culture. Das (2023) states that any assertions of cultural and regional superiority from India often trigger vulnerability, resistance, and replication from its neighbours. India's aspirations to become a regional superpower and, at the same time, to become a Vishwaguru are paradoxical, as expansionist ambitions and political assertiveness cannot go hand in hand with spiritual inclusiveness and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Guha (2024) argues that for India to be a friend to all countries, it needs to first reorient its attitude towards its neighbours by cultivating truth and respect in its relations. Not Vishwaguru but becoming a Vishwamitra (universal friend) should be the ideal of India's neighbourhood and foreign policy. Hindutva's majoritarian ethnonationalism and emphasis on Hindu glory are problematic to its regional and international relations.

> This imagination is problematic, not only for its parochialism but also for opening up the state–nation relations in a sub-continent where both faith and language work simultaneously as markers of national identity. Its problematization of the diasporic otherness is a natural corollary of this political excavation (Chatterjee & Das, 2021, p. 572).

Since the days of the anti-British movement, India has been experiencing the challenge of provincialism. While the Congress relied on federal structure and pluralism to restore balance between provincial aspirations and pan-Indian nationalism, Hindutva forces elevated majoritarianism as nationalist aspirations and diluted their regional assertions. The ideological framework which the BJP employed at the domestic level to construct popular narratives in favour of one nation was also used by them to form cultural bonds with the Indian diaspora. Modi's foreign policy is deeply rooted in asserting the indigenous and maximising national interests. The nation's thirst for power and control, which Tagore blamed for threatening peace and security both inside and outside, is being prominently seen in Modi's foreign doctrine. Indian diaspora has evolved into a strategic amplifier of Modi's nationalist aspirations. He has often emphasised their active engagement in building a global narrative in defence of Hindu India. While addressing the Indian diaspora at New York's Madison Square Garden, Allphones Arena in Sydney, and Wembley Stadium in Britain, Modi repeatedly asked them to provide money, time and technical expertise to his signature programmes (Kinnvall, 2019, p. 291). His wave of nationalism was so resilient that it enthralled even the Indian diaspora living across the world. The nationalist persona of Donald Trump and his personal camaraderie with Hindutva icon Modi made the Indian diaspora in the US consider it their patriotic duty to support Trump during the Presidential election of 2016 (Kinnvall, 2019, pp. 291-292). While

the Indian diaspora should logically represent the composite culture of the home and the host country, the Modi wave has seen a rise in their exclusive cultural assertions.

Modi's foreign policy represents a shift from passivity to assertiveness, non-alignment to strategic multi-alignment, covert operations to overt operations, and disarmament to militarisation. Tagore's idealism was inherited by Nehru in his foreign policy; rather, his Panchasheel agreement with China was influenced by Tagore's ideas. The BJP government under Modi, which is critical of Nehruvian idealism in foreign policy, blamed it for India's continued status as a third-world country even after seven decades of independence. The scepticism of idealism made the Modi government choose realism in foreign policy. From Nehruvian non-alignment, the government has shifted India towards multi-alignment for the attainment of national interests (Kaushik, 2021, p. 72). It stands for economic independence and engagement of India with other nations on equal terms as a sovereign nation-state. Tandon (2016, p. 58) argues that Modi selectively engages with those nations which hold the key to the maximisation of India's interests. He uses smart power by merging soft power and hard power.

The Hindutva government has been seen exporting Hindutva in the guise of spiritualism to rationalise its Hindutva project both domestically and internationally. There has been a steady rise in the saffronisation of Indian diplomacy. While Hindutva diplomacy confronts the projection of India as a plural and secular state, it invests heavily in projecting civilizational greatness, an ultra-masculine understanding of security, Hindu revivalism, saffronisation of national self, and uniform civilizational-religious identity. Many new appointees at High Commissions and embassies have been RSS activists (Huju, 2022, p. 428). The saffronised diplomacy is not only devoid of the universal codes of secular-liberal foreign policy but is also charged with ethnonational supremacy. Hindutva's promotion of spirituality and culture at global platforms has a double objective. While it aspires to export the Indic knowledge and spiritualism globally, it is also a part of its larger cultural policy to promote Hinduism as the crux of India. Modi's lobbying made the UN declare 21st June as International Yoga Day in 2015. India is also promoting Ayurveda as an alternative to allopathy. As part of his religious diplomacy, Modi is visiting sacred sites of different faiths, meeting religious-spiritual leaders, and gifting a copy of the Bhagavad Gita to heads of state (Mannathukkaren & MacEachern, 2023, p. 2377).

While under Hindutva rule, there has been a shift in India's foreign policy from humanitarianism to hard geopolitics and from idealism to realism, the element of altruism has

not totally vanished and continues to depict India's commitment to global welfare. While on outer assessment, the idea of universal humanism may appear as a utopia of Tagore having no practical utility in self-centred internationalism, the scale of problems the world is facing today, i.e. climate change, drought, melting of glaciers, famines and starvation, human rights violation, wars, and communalism show us that only through collaboration and goodwill we can solve these problems. While Tagore denounces nationalism as anti-human ideology, the Hindutva government views nationalism as the energising spirit which binds an individual with his countrymen and encourages all to strive for the glory and prosperity of the national community. To them, nationalism is equally important to internationalism.

Tagore believed in cosmopolitan Hinduism, preferred the spirituality of the Upanishads over ritualism of doctrines, and his religion was welcoming towards the philosophical elements of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. On the other hand, Hindutva strongly defends ritualism and idol worship in Hinduism. They oppose the cosmopolitisation of Hinduism and want Hinduism to retain its identity as a homogenous faith. They wish it to remain totally different from Abrahamic faiths and therefore, oppose Hinduism being influenced by Islam and Christianity. The BJP's religious conservatism, opposition to the liberalisation of Hinduism, suppression of the freedom of religion of Christians and Muslims, and denouncement of secularism contradict the liberal, multi-polar, and egalitarian world order. But the vision of Vishwaguru as aspired by the Hindutva nationalists conveys that India should lead entire humanity, regardless of religious differences, on the path of truth and happiness. The discourses of Vishwaguru, Akhand Bharat, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam are inconsistent with each other. At the G20 Summit of 2023 held in India, whose theme was '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*- one Earth, One Family, One Future', Prime Minister Modi stated:

> At the place where we are gathered today, just a few kilometres away from here, stands a pillar that is nearly two-and-a-half thousand years old. Inscribed on this pillar in the Prakrit language are the words: 'Hevam loksa hitmukhe ti, atha iyam natisu hevam'. Meaning, the welfare and happiness of humanity should always be ensured. Two-and-a-half thousand years ago, the land of India gave this message to the entire world… (Express News Service, 2023).

At the Summit for Democracy organised by the US in December 2021, asserting the ancient roots of Indian democracy and keeping its stature at par with some of the oldest democracies in the world, Modi stated that the democratic ethos is part of Indian civilisation. He referred to the elected republican city-states of Lichhavi and Shakya, which existed in India 2500 years ago, and the Uttaramerur inscriptions of the 10th century A.D., mentioning democratic

participation (Nagda & Choudhury, 2021). During his speech on India's Independence Day on 15th August 2014, he asserted that one day Mother India would be a World Guru (Hall, 2024, p.2).

Despite the Hindutva assertiveness shaping India's foreign relations, the element of humanitarian policy has not left India's global outlook. A decade-long journey of Modi's foreign policy shows its commitment to the collective good of humanity. Although the future fulfilment of national interests may be a latent objective underlying these foreign policy initiatives, their contribution to the welfare of global communities cannot be discarded. India is committed to investing $10 billion in Africa for people-centric projects and has invested a huge amount in war-affected Afghanistan. Under the International Solar Alliance (ISA) initiative launched by India and France, India will be investing $2 billion to promote solar energy as a means of sustainable energy and a solution to climate change (Akbar, 2017). When Nepal was struck by an earthquake in 2023, India sent an emergency aid package, consisting of essential medicines and relief materials, as well as promised USD 1 billion for post-earthquake reconstruction (ANI, 2023). Similarly, in 2015, when Nepal was struck by an earthquake, India responded within 15 minutes of the calamity under Operation Maitri. Under Operation Raahat, India evacuated Indian as well as foreign nationals of 41 countries from Yemen when the armed conflict began after Saudi Arabia attacked Yemen's national capital Sana'a. While such evacuation operations are not new to India, they show India's continued commitment to humanitarian causes. The search and rescue operation named Operation Dost was initiated by the Indian government to help Syria and Turkey when both countries were severely affected by the earthquake in February 2023 (Express Web Desk, 2023). This was a widely applauded mission as India decided to aid Turkey despite its close relations with Pakistan, its defence of Pakistan's claim over Kashmir, and its initial opposition to India's inclusion into the Nuclear Suppliers Group. This shows that Modi's foreign policy, despite its firm realism, succeeded in keeping humanity above the national interests.

During the COVID-19 crisis, using its pharma capabilities, India supplied millions of vaccine doses under 'vaccine diplomacy' to African countries to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. This gesture improved India's reputation and advocated for India as a key player in the multipolar world order and a guide to the Global South (Meghe, 2024). India also organised events such as a series of Hindu-Buddhist dialogues and a Global Buddhist Summit in 2023, promoting cross-culturalism (Hall, 2024, p.4). During the opening ceremony of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's 46th session in New Delhi in July 2024, Modi, highlighting the

composite culture of the world, stated that heritage is a shared consciousness of humanity which needs to be used for the betterment of the world and to connect hearts (PTI, 2024). In the end, a deep reflection on India's foreign policy and global commitment shows that though national interests dominate Hindutva foreign policy, the element of internationalism and universal family, which Tagore always asserted, has continued to shape it.

5.9 Authoritarianism and Hero Worship: The Contemporary Tendencies

Both Tagore and Tilak had deliberated on the danger of the concentration of political power in fewer hands. Tagore's condemnation of nationalism and Tilak's anti-British activism represent a dissent against authoritarianism and unbridled statism. Tilak's swaraj demanded ethical governance, and the government must be dedicated to the welfare of all. As and when the British bureaucracy and British government began to act autocratically and ignore people's genuine demands, he used his journalistic skills to condemn the tyranny of the foreign ruler. Due to his rigorous criticism of the English government, he was subjected to charges of sedition. Despite Modi presenting himself as a democratic leader and man of the masses, majoritarian populism has fostered a cult of personality around him, which legitimises his authoritarian style of working. He detested any kind of resistance to his authority within and outside the party. The cult formed around Modi made him bigger and beyond the codes of ordinary morality and democracy. Ambedkar, while criticising hero worship in politics, stated that bhakti in religion could be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship (Diwaker, 2019). Several leaders, including Xerxes, Stalin, Hitler, Alexander, etc., had a strong self-belief and made the masses believe that they were the saviours who would restore the nation's glory.

There is a steady but significant upsurge in centralisation under Modi's rule, which disregards the utility of dialogue and consensus in the democratic-federal framework. Sharma and Swenden (2022, p. 607) argue that the Modi government has not only reduced cooperative federalism but its unilateral decision-making, without consulting state governments, opposition, and other stakeholders, became visible during Demonetisation, the COVID-19 pandemic, New Education Policy-2020, Goods and Service Tax (GST), Farm Laws, Triple Talaq Bill, and abrogation of Article 370. In 2016, the BJP dismantled and replaced the Planning Commission of India (PC) with NITI Aayog, headed by the Prime Minister. Tharamangalam (2016, p. 302) argues that with this alteration, the government scrapped the

apex channel of public participation, institutionalised economic planning, and target-centric and development-oriented resource allocation. Despite Aayog being celebrated by the government for fostering better centre-state collaboration against the centralised PC, critics argue that Aayog's advisory status and domination by the centre will not only make it a fully centralised institution but also practically inefficient compared to the erstwhile PC.

Whenever the opposition raised questions over the incompetence of the ruling party, they were labelled as anti-national. When the then CM of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, asked the government for the footage evidence of a surgical strike conducted in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK), his rational question was termed as disrespect towards the country. He was called anti-national (Murarka, 2016). Ramdev Baba, a popular yoga guru and Hindu nationalist, commented that those who refuse to chant Vande Mataram were anti-nationals and must be beheaded (PTI, 2016). Sharma and Swenden mention that the BJP government is also accused of centralised policymaking by overriding parliamentary procedures. While during UPA-I 60 percent and during UPA-II 71 percent of the bills were referred to parliamentarian committees, during Modi's first tenure (2014-2019) 25 percent and Modi's second tenure (2019-2022 cont.) only 11 percent of the bills were referred to parliamentarian committees. During Vajpayee led NDA between 2000-2004, 40 ordinances were promulgated. While during the 10 years of UPA (2004-2014), 51 ordinances were promulgated, during Modi's first tenure alone (2014-2019), 60 ordinances were issued (Sharma & Swenden, 2022, p. 614).

The Modi government has been found insensitive towards the cause and security of farmers in India. When the UPA government passed the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARRA) in 2013 to replace the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 which was criticised for its low compensation, the BJP criticised the act as it emphasised Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and obtaining the consent of land losers and people whose livelihood would be affected. In its pro-bourgeoisie and neo-liberal mandate, the nationalist party found the act unviable. To overhaul these pro-farmers 'procedural delays' and speed up corporate-centric 'Make in India', the government passed the LARR (Amendment) Bill in 2015. The Modi government has been blamed for ignoring agrarian problems to promote the industrial sector (Tharamangalam, 2016, pp. 302-303).

Post-truth is an era where emotion and not reason dominate public discourse. Indian politics has embraced the post-truth and anti-scientific temperament approach in contemporary times.

This can be determined from the increased promotion and popularisation of anti-intellectualism, anti-scientism, fake news, and distorted historical claims (Guha, 2019, as cited in Mannathukkaren & MacEachern, 2023, p. 2372). While Tagore saw the truth, creative imagination, and humanism together as a path to make the country and the world a better place for living, under the Hindutva rule, the trend of polarisation, irrationalism, and pseudoscience has increased to an alarming level. Highlighting the current trend of Deep Lies and rationalisation of myths in India, Nanda (2022) argues that

> In India, in contrast, the Big Lies are being supplemented with state-sponsored academic programmes in "Indian Knowledge Systems" (IKS) aimed at rewriting the rules of reasoning that would not only justify some sundry big or small lie, but an alternative narrative of history and science that would be valid from within the parameters of these ancient Hindu knowledge systems.

Since his coming to power, Modi has been a godlike figure to his numerous followers. In 2022, BJP Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan argued that Modi is like a superhuman and possesses godly traits. In 2019, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya stated that those who support Modi support India; those who are against Modi support anti-India forces. Modi's followers argue that India's true decolonisation occurred in 2014 when Modi came to power. While several news channels were occupied with building a cult around Modi, elevating him to the level of saviour, news houses like the New York Times, which rationally criticise Modi, were targeted as Hindu-phobic, anti-India, and anti-Modi (Mannathukkaren & MacEachern, 2023, pp. 2378-2379). The pro-Modi lobby, which includes academicians and news anchors, to Indian diaspora and commoners, has built the persona of Modi as the greatest figure in Indian politics, the embodiment of supreme wisdom and unquestionable courage, whose birth and legacy are the representations of the divine will, and who will change the destiny of India. Ramachandra Guha compared the cult of Modi to the cult of Mao Zedong. 'In its wilful destruction of the economy, demonetisation was akin to Mao's order to melt all household iron objects in backyard furnaces during the disastrous Great Leap Forward' (Guha, 2020). Instead of the state as the supreme institution and sovereign even to elected representatives, the state is demoted as a deputy of the Modi. Democratic checks and balances and constitutional restraints are presented as obstacles hindering the redemptive act of Modi. Using propaganda and handy state machinery, like Mao, Modi presents himself as omniscient and infallible. People are expected to faithfully obey his instructions, though they cannot understand them (Guha, 2020).

In Hindutva's continuum, whoever questions or criticises the decisions and failures of the government is demeaned as an anti-India force. After the heavy criticisms of the

government for over the 30 deaths in the stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, Modi stated that people with a slave mentality engage in mocking India's religious-cultural traditions with the support of foreign powers (Athrady, 2025). At another point, referring to civil society activists, Modi said that '…a new category of *andolanjivis* [protesters] has come to the fore who feed off protests. They jump into all sorts of protests… They are like parasites who feed off protests' (TNN, 2021). Modi, during the 2014 election campaigning, stated, 'In 2014, let us not vote for any party or person but let us VOTE FOR INDIA!' (Jaffrelot, 2015, p. 154). With this, he asserted that Modi is India and India is Modi. He reinforced hero-worship and identification of the nation with a person, which is not only detrimental to democratic politics but also to the idea of election and republicanism.

The Hindutva ideology, despite its communal underpinnings, has been normalised and secularised within the framework of democracy in recent years. Even the judiciary has defined Hindutva as a way of life which treats it as Indianisation or Indianness. Even campaigning in elections using Hindutva rhetoric has been immunised from the communal or anti-constitutional tags (Anderson & Longkumer, 2018, p. 374). Christophe Jaffrelot argues that even the stalwart institutions such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and the judiciary have become the instruments of the governing party (Bhatia, 2022).

During the last decades of the 20th century, the BJP started emphasising the Swadeshi economy. It stood for internal economic liberalisation, eradication of License Raj, economic deregulation, curtailing of bureaucratic control to promote internal private initiatives and investments, and limitations on foreign investment and international competition of MNCs to promote local industries. It asserted permitting foreign capital in core areas or those in which Indians have not developed expertise and logistics. The demand for restrictions on the full-fledged opening of the domestic market to international players was to ensure significant maturing of Indian industries before exposing them to global competition (Gillan, 2001, pp. 48-49). However, in the current times, the BJP government has been promoting privatisation of the public sector, FDI liberalisation, and capitalism.

Modi presented his electoral victory not only as a democratic play but as the dawn of a new age, which would transform the socio-political and religio-cultural landscape of India and rectify historical wrongs. It is nothing less than a cultural revolution and a Hindu renaissance.

He enhanced the populist consciousness by nationalising the regional, religionising the politics, politicising the religion and so on. The amalgamation of all into one created a prophetic aura around him. He is Hindu yet is Indian; he is poor yet is India's brand ambassador; he is a nationalist yet is an internationalist; he is a revivalist yet is a reformer; he is conservative yet the most liberal; he is communal yet is secular; he is autocrat yet is true democrat; he will wear suits as well as saffron robes. The cult of Modi has become bigger than the Indian state:

> His rallies [in] UP were branded as Vijay Shankhnad Rallies, the rallies in Bihar were called Hunkar Rallies. In Karnataka if it was Bharatha Gellisi rallies, in Maharashtra it was Maha Garjana. The rally in Arunachal Pradesh was called Vijay Sankalp Abhiyan Rally, in Assam it was called Maha Jagaran Rally, in Goa it was called Vijay Sankalp Rally, in Himachal Pradesh it was called Parivartan Rally… (Jaffrelot, 2015, p. 152).

Modi merged social, cultural, economic, and religious into politics so well that all codes of political morality seem insignificant. By depicting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as a prince, Mr. Golden Spoon, the elite class, and westernised, and himself as a common man, a tea seller, and true *desi*, he made himself the man of the masses, a hoax popularly used by leaders who rose to autocracy.

5.10 Conclusion

The contemporary Hindutva nationalism of the BJP is an evolved formation of the Hindu nationalism of Tilak. While it has retained some of its attributes, several of its dimensions have changed over the years. The patriarchal, xenophobic, and casteist nature of Hindutva nationalism has survived even the democratic nature of the Indian state. Rather, the existing state has been used by the ideology to formalise and institutionalise its regressive social engineering. It has glorified aggression and destructiveness over pacifism and constructiveness. Tagore's dream of a self-governing community, transnationalism, universal humanism, holistic humanist education, cosmopolitanism, and rationalist spiritualism is being replaced in India by authoritarian statism, egoistic nationalism, communal conscience, pseudoscientific pedagogy, homogenisation, and religious irrationalism accompanied by absurd ritualism. The very ideals of democracy, humanity, and universalism are gradually fading away.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

From the colonial to decolonial epoch, from secular to a communal undertone, and from nationalist to universalist perplexities, the 'idea of India' remained a complex discourse. To compartmentalise the anatomy of Indian nationalism into clear-cut categories or to present it within the dichotomy of 'this versus that' would be an academic fiasco, as fitting nationalist, counter-nationalist, and neutralist thoughts into a linear narrative would be a challenging task. The entire discourse of India's independence movement, chased within the metanarrative of nationalism and self-determination, pushed 'we the people' into the dilemma and equivocation of choosing between India as a cosmopolitan civilisation with society superseding the state and India as a centralised, homogenised, and realpolitik-oriented nation-state. Similarly, situated between the imperative of modernity and the romanticised appeal of the medieval, the discourse neither fully cherished reformist trajectories nor truly embraced revivalist aspirations. The colonial ordeal and nationalist dissuasion against open society or universalist inclusiveness convinced the political leadership to choose centralised statism, sovereigntism, and a fortress state over idealist unconditional cosmopolitanism. The preference for nationalism as the premise or frame of reference with regard to domestic and foreign policy and tacit endorsement of majoritarian culture eroded the country's naturally and smoothly interwoven cross-culturalism, goodwill, and fraternal humanism. The shift from a civilisational society into a nation-state converted India from an emblem of universal humanity into an icon of a self-centred community.

The overindulgence of nationalism in contemporary India and nationalism becoming the hegemonic ideology are antithetical to Indic traditions, which conventionally believe in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). Narcissistic nationalist tendencies can never be compatible with India's faith in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and the ambition to become a *Vishwaguru*. A universal *guru* (guide or teacher) must be altruistic, philanthropic, and compassionate towards the whole of mankind; instead, nationalism is historically known to exhibit collective selfishness, egotism, and vengefulness. Hence, India as a *Vishwaguru* under Hindutva nationalism is an oxymoronic argumentation. The ideological divide between Tagore on one side and Tilak and the BJP on the other represents a divide between universalist transnationalism and self-centred nationalism. Universalism is a process of collective salvation

and a symbol of progress. On the other hand, the obsession with nationalist virtues is a sign of retrogression and materialistic tendencies.

Tilak was an oligarchy sympathiser. When one applies the Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony and passive revolution in the Indian case, one finds that Tilak identified national independence as political westernisation and sociocultural indigenisation. Being an ardent guardian of Brahminic order, he was irked by the anti-caste efforts of progressive reformers who were anticipating social egalitarianism, which stems from faith in social liberation. After the death of Tilak in 1920, this mode of thought received institutional and structured form in the form of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS. However, observing the ferocious emergence of Muslim nationalism, the voices of Hindu orthodoxy often presented ambivalent stands on the question of caste and social justice to procure nominal Hindu unity and equality. At the same time, the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate arose over patchwork changes versus radical reformation. The Gandhi-Ambedkar ideological hostility was organically rooted in the choice between spiritualised casteism, naturalised hierarchy, a weak state, and the glorification of poverty against the welfare-oriented democracy vis-à-vis the organised centralised state, detabaooisation, and the post-identity society. There was an ideational similarity between Tagore's and Ambedkar's vision of a new India. While Tagore considered the democratisation of society and humanisation of culture as means to build an ideal community, Ambedkar saw social democracy, detoxification of culture, and formation of a welfare state as essentials of an ideal India. While Tagore put faith in a proficient society, Ambedkar upheld the state as an agent of social justice. Both stood for post-identity society. According to Tagore, identities such as nationality curtail a person's creative imagination and global outlook, whereas for Ambedkar, the identities rooted in caste pride prevent the establishment of an egalitarian order and the fostering of fraternity.

Tagore's philosophy of enlightened society, anti-nationalism, universalism, and anti-statism and the Indian democracy's vision of a constitutional state and secular society received a major setback in the form of Hindutva nationalism and Hindutva conservatism. Hindutva nationalism, through its masculine politics, ultranationalism, communal segregation, ethnic marginalisation, bourgeoisie democracy, monopolistic economy, cultural revivalism, social conservatism, geopolitical ambitions, and sanctification of pre-modern social codes, has deeply sabotaged the efforts of Tagore and makers of Indian democracy.

The roots of Hindutva nationalism date back to Tilak's polarised creed. Tilak had retained a patriarchal stand with regard to social power and political power. He identified nationalistic fervour with the manliness and masculinity of Shivaji and opposed efforts towards gender equality and the emancipation of women. The Hindutva ideology, too, upholds patriarchal virtues. Ram Puniyani argues that the Hindu (Hindutva) nationalism of the BJP and Sangh subordinate women to men. The female counterpart of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is named Rashtra Sevika Samiti, but the word 'swayam', which means self or self-capable, was purposely omitted (Puniyani, 2020). In recent years, there has been a rampant increase in social media content that openly propagates misogyny and toxic masculinity. The feminine traits and womanhood are often associated with weakness, irrationality, and ignobility. This cultural worship of masculinity, though not directly related to it, is running parallel to the masculine nationalism of the BJP. Prime Minister Modi is often projected by the BJP as a disciplined, traditionalist, and religious patriarch of the extended family called the nation, wherein all family members are expected to blindly obey him. While PM Modi boasts about his '56-inch' chest, which represents a masculine urge to fight, it also invites reflections on how, sometimes, ultra-sentimentalism can overshadow intellectualism in political discourse.

Tilak was a proponent of Brahminic hegemony under the state and social hierarchy with Brahmanism as its apex. Though Hindutva nationalism and the BJP do not outrightly propagate caste divisions and caste supremacy, their ambivalent stand on the question of caste in sociology, politics, and economics of the nation has opened significant space for caste elites to discover fresh modes to reinforce caste codes and social hierarchy. In recent years in rural India, the upper-caste elites, by disregarding the ideals of liberal democracy and constitutionalism, are vigorously working to re-impose defunct varna-based social duties, which, for Shudras and Dalits, mean social slavery. Temples and other Hindu places of worship are using their 'autonomy' to enforce casteism and dismiss constitutional progressivism. Upper castes use strategies such as social boycotts and emotional pressures, which are difficult to detect and criminalise under the law, to compel the lower castes to succumb to their impositions. Presently, when the demand for the caste census is being constantly made to track the representation of lower castes, mainly OBCs, in employment, education, etc., under affirmative actions, the BJP has shown reluctance to act. According to Wankhede (2023), the party's reluctance stems from the fear that such a census would disclose lower castes' under-representation in various state institutions. It would blaze a new class movement for equitable

representation in accordance with the formula of reservations and other policies, and consequently, it would damage the BJP's Hindu vote bank.

A self-administering society was Tagore's utopia of independent India. The core elements of this social system include destatism, bottom-to-top development, depoliticisation, denationalisation, composite education, agrarian to semi-modernised lifestyle, and universal communitarianism. Tagore and other liberal thinkers of India had warned against authoritarian statism, cultural ultranationalism, and totalitarianism. The core objective of their resistance to such transformation included the prevention of the subjugation of people and society by the omnipotent-mechanistic state. However, with the rise of the Hindutva government, totalitarianism, statism, and authoritarianism are being presented as essentials of development. Often, the liberal democratic ideals and dissent are targeted as incompetent virtues and stumbling blocks. The government has been found using a dual strategy to implement its tyranny. While it sometimes neutralises the state machinery to permit vigilante groups to perform extrajudicial functions, at times, it empowers the state to suppress all voices of dissent (Jaffrelot, 2022, p. 350).

Tagore had given immense significance to creativity, imagination, free speech, and holistic education. However, the Hindutva government has been criticised for suppressing dissent either by using legal glitches and imposing criminal charges or by censoring ideas and using the force of vigilante hordes. Tagore was critical of nationalism and statism as they suppress individuals and humanity at large. Present India is the merger of nationalism and statism. The Hindutva government has repeatedly used draconian anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and security agencies to curb dissent in a highly undemocratic way. Between 2014 and 2020, more than 6,900 cases were reported under UAPA, and more than 10,000 people were arrested (Doshi, 2021). Tagore argued that a coercion-free social environment is a must for the potential growth of mankind. However, the Freedom House, a US-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), in its 2021 annual report on global political rights and liberties, argued that since 2014, there has been a deterioration in political rights and liberties in India, and Indian democracy has fallen from the free to partly free category ("India is now only", 2021).

Tagore saw education as the most important tool of man-making and building a better world. While the state should treat education as one of its top priorities and spend public revenue to inculcate scientific temperament and humanism among students and encourage

them to pursue higher education, the present government has been found to reduce expenditure on education. Despite promising in 2014 to increase public spending on education to 6% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), between 2014 and 2024, the central government allocated an average of 0.44% of the annual GDP for education, a figure notably lower than the 0.61% of GDP allocated by the UPA government from 2004 to 2014. Similarly, the spending on higher education declined as the government showed a trend of moving from grants to loans, as well as reduced grants (Deeksha, 2024). There has been a steady rise in the privatisation, homogenisation, hegemonisation, and commercialisation of education in India and a consequent decline in state-run and state-aided educational institutions. This shift would severely affect the disadvantaged children and polarise the education within the class structure. The National Education Policy-2020 of the BJP government is severely criticised for opening doors for extensive privatisation and centralisation of education ("How BJP is Pushing", 2023). Though the state-run educational institutions will not completely perish, the decline in their overall standards compared to private institutions, both in terms of infrastructure and academics, would restrict the lower class's access to quality education.

Although private educational institutions offer state-of-the-art infrastructure and academically top-notch scientific education, their grade-centric and employment-oriented teaching mechanisms totally wipe out the possibility of inculcating holistic man-making education among children. When children focus only on professional education and lack an in-depth understanding of the humanities or social sciences, the nation becomes overcrowded with workers, but the space of intellectualism remains vacant. In the absence of an intelligentsia to critically evaluate contemporary sociopolitical and economic problems, the democratic institutions will crumble, and the ruling class will monopolise political power in the absence of vigilant citizenry. The poverty of knowledge of the humanities and the absence of critical inquiry will fill the country with ignorant voters.

Tagore's *Ghare Baire* is one of the most relevant novels to understand contemporary chaos. The Hindutva party has built the narrative that the state and the government are one and the same and shall receive total obedience from the subject. Even the progressive criticisms and the acts of exposing the government's follies are depicted as anti-national activities. While the state is permanent and the government is temporal, the party has amalgamated both, creating a divine aura around the authority. The rational criticisms are either laughed at or condemned as anti-nationalism. In *Ghare Baire*, when Nikhil objects to the antagonism proliferated under the Swadeshi movement and tries to edify the flag-wavers, he gets blamed

as unpatriotic, unmasculine, and cowardly. In a Hindutva-ruled society, those who hold opinions and perspectives different from those of the majority and government are defamed as anti-nationals. Like Tagore, those who seek solutions to authentic socio-economic issues and disparage superfluous nationalism receive stigmatisation.

There is a significant rise in social intolerance towards Muslims under Hindutva rule. Often, during the celebration of festivals such as Shivaji Jayanti, Ram Janmashtami, etc., slogans are raised to provoke Muslims. Instead of controlling mob behaviour, Muslims are asked to stay home or not to go into areas where they could be harassed by radical mobs during such events. Tagore's India represented Hindu-Muslim unity, both in terms of unity between people and confluence of culture. Even Tilak, during the later years of his life, rigorously worked to foster fraternity between Hindus and Muslims and to secularise the national movement. However, under the Hindutva ideology, the gap between Hindus and Muslims is continuously widening. Even regions such as Konkan, which for centuries experienced Hindu-Muslim peaceful co-existence, are seeing a rise in religious communal tensions. The BJP is seen encouraging the installation of Shivaji statues across the Northern part of Deccan India, including Goa, Southern Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka predominantly. This *Shivajification* is killing the historical plurality of this region.

While Tagore preached pantheism and deism, the BJP's religious philosophy is hanging between temples, idols, and doctrines. Another point of concern is that the ongoing hype-building around Ram as the supreme Hindu god is actually detrimental to the devotional plurality of Hindus. Hindus believe in and worship God(s) in various forms, let alone nature worship. Their faith freely moves between *sagun bhakti* (divine in form) and *nirgun bhakti* (formless divine). There are Vedic gods and post-Vedic gods. Rather, in much of India, worship of a village or local deity is the most common practice. The standardisation and state-sponsored promotion of Ram as a 'special' God is against the devotional diversity of Hindus. Similarly, the over-hyped celebrations like the Kumbh Mela and people's madness surrounding it in the form of causing stampedes and destroying railway properties out of anger are somewhere shifting the faith from spiritualism and personal seeking of the divine into superficial celebrations, which are anything but devotion. Jha (2025) argues that in recent years, amorphous and multi-dimensional Hinduism has been shifting towards centralisation, doctrinal emphasis, gigantic gatherings, and ritualism. It is trying to adopt an Abrahamic character.

Tagore wanted India to adopt the role of Visva-Bharati and contribute to universal good by following the ideals of cosmopolitanism and humanism. These ideals, to some extent, survived in the foreign policy of Nehru and his successors. However, since the time the ultranationalist Hindutva government came to power in India, both of Tagore's aspirations, that are, India promoting universal humanism and India obliterating nationalism and statism, received setbacks to some extent. The BJP's hyper-nationalism and the Sangh's Hindutva thought are antithetical to Tagore's philosophy. While universalism is still visible in India's foreign policy, the idea of a secular, inclusive, and cosmopolitan India is slowly disappearing.

When we separate Tilak's political journey into pre-Mandalay Tilak and post-Mandalay Tilak, we find that the patriarchal, masculine, upper castes-centric, anti-subaltern, Brahminic, and conservative notion of Hindu nationalism which Tilak professed during his pre-Mandalay years, found its continuation in even more severe ways in the ultranationalist aspirations of Sangh-BJP's Hindutva ideology, both within and outside politics.

This thesis tried to analyse contemporary Hindutva nationalism in India and locate the influence of Tilak's nation-centric philosophy and Tagore's universalist aspirations on contemporary nationalist discourse in India. A detailed analysis concludes that Hindutva nationalism has largely retained the majoritarian character of Tilak's ethnic nationalism. It shares the same suspicion towards Muslims and has masculinised politics. Both have equal inclination towards social conservatism and economic liberalism. Nevertheless, Tagore's universalist aspirations have an ambiguous and contrasting position within Hindutva discourse. While the Bharatiya Janata Party aspires for India to play a spiritually dominant role in global politics as a Vishwaguru by fostering secularism and cooperation among countries, its domestic policy, stained with communalism, conservatism, and politics of hatred, raises new questions. For India to become a Vishwaguru and lead the world on the path of collective good and harmony, it first needs to overcome domestic policy errors. As long as it continues to build the edifice of its politics on the foundation of exclusive nationalism, it cannot fully commit itself to global good in the spirit of Visva-Bharati. Hence, the hypotheses are proved that Tagore's transnationalism is more compatible with heterogeneous India and its universalist aspirations. Tilak's cultural nationalism is analogous to the Hindutva nationalism of contemporary India and its crude aspirations. The contemporary Hindutva nationalism is incongruent with the liberal democratic ethos and spirit of harmony.

Glossary

Adharma: Unrighteousness or moral disorder

Advaita Vedanta: Non-dualist philosophy

Advaita: Non-dualism; the belief that the self and ultimate reality (Brahman) are one.

Ahimsa: Principle of non-violence

Akhand Bharat: A vision of an undivided India

Antyajas: Outcaste or low caste people

Arjuna: A central warrior prince in the Hindu epic Mahabharata

Aryavarth: Land of Aryans. One of the names of India in cultural contexts

Ashramas: A system that divides human life into four stages

Atmasakti: Inner strength. The term was popularised by Rabindranath Tagore.

Avarna: Communities and individuals who fall outside the traditional four-fold varna system

Avatar: Divine incarnation on Earth

Ayodhya movement: Political-religious campaign centred on Ram Janmabhoomi

Bahuroopi: Traditional folk performer or impersonator

Baliraj: Reign of King Bali

Bhadralok: Educated elite class

Bhagavad Gita: A poetic spiritual dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna on duty, ethics, and devotion.

Bhakti movement: Devotional movement emphasising love and surrender towards God.

Bhakti: Devotion

Bhand: Folk performance styles from Maharashtra

Bharatmata: Mother India

Bharatvarsh: One of the names of India in cultural contexts

Bhumi mata: Mother Earth

Brahmacharya: Celibacy and disciplined living, often associated with student life.

Charkha: spinning wheel symbolising self-reliance.

Chaturvarna: Fourfold caste system

Chitpavan Brahmins: A prominent Maharashtrian Brahmin community

Dalit-Bahujan: Emphasises the collective identity of marginalised communities, i.e. untouchables and lower castes

De-Macaulayisation. Efforts to undo colonial education legacies by reviving indigenous languages, philosophies, and curricula.

Deoband: Islamic seminary and reform movement.

Desh: Nation

Dharma Bhumi: Land of duty

Dharma Sabha: Religious assembly

Dharmic: Pertaining to Dharma

Dussera: A major Hindu festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil

Ekla chalo re: Bengali phrase meaning ‘walk alone’ popularised by Rabindranath Tagore.

Gau shala: Protective shelter for cows

Gau-mata: Mother Cow

Gau-sabhas: Forums dedicated to cow-related concerns

Ghar Wapsi: Reconversion initiative by Hindu groups, framed as a return to ancestral faith.

Ghazwa-e-Hind: Apocalyptic concept in some Islamic traditions about a future battle in India, often misused in extremist rhetoric

Gurukul: Ancient residential school system

Harijan: Gandhi’s term for Dalits, meaning children of God

Hindu Pad Padshahi: A vision of a pan-Indian Hindu empire

Hindubhoomi: Land of Hindus. One of the names of India

Hindutva**:** A political and cultural ideology that seeks to define Indian identity primarily through Hindu values, heritage, and nationalism**.**

Hindutvisation: Reshaping of identity and policy through Hindutva ideology, emphasising Hindu-centric nationalism

Holi: Hindu festival associated with colours

Ijtihad: Independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence.

Jaat: Sub-caste

Kali: A fierce Hindu goddess associated with destruction

Kaliyuga: The current age of moral decline as per Hindu cosmology.

Karma Bhumi: Land of action

Karma Yoga: Path of selfless action as a means to spiritual liberation

Karma: Action

Khadi: Handspun and handwoven fabric

Khari Boli: Dialect of Hindi spoken in northern India.

Khot: Landholders and revenue collectors in the Konkan region of Maharashtra

Kirtan: Devotional singing in call-and-response style

Krishna: Deity symbolising dharma, devotion, and cosmic power.

Kumbh Mela: Hindu religious fair and pilgrimage.

Kunbi: Agrarian community from western India

Lavani: Folk performance styles from Maharashtra

Magh Mela: Hindu religious fair and pilgrimage.

Mahabharata: One of the epics central to Hinduism

Mahar: One of the untouchable castes

Maharki: Social obligations of the mahars

Manusmriti: An ancient Hindu text of legal codes.

Matru Bhumi: Motherland

Maya: Illusion or the deceptive appearance of the material world

Mela: Religious fairs

Pitru Bhumi: Fatherland

Povada: Traditional Marathi ballad

Punya Bhumi: Sacred land

Puranic: Related to the Puranas

Rakhi: Thread tied during Raksha Bandhan symbolising a bond.

Ram Rajya: Idealised rule of Ram symbolising justice and harmony.

Ram: Deity symbolising dharma, devotion, and cosmic power.

Ramayana: One of the epics central to Hinduism.

Rashtra: Nation

Rashtravad: Nationalism

Ratha yatra: Public chariot procession

Ravanraj: Reign of King Raavan

Ryotwari: A British colonial land revenue arrangement that established a direct relationship between the government and individual cultivators (ryots), bypassing landlords or zamindars

Sadhana: Spiritual discipline or practice.

Sadhu: Ascetic

Saffronisation: Perceived infusion of Hindu nationalist ideology into public institutions, education, and cultural narratives

Sangeet Natak: Musical drama

Sankhya: Dualistic philosophy distinguishing between consciousness (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti).

Sanyasi: A renunciate who has given up worldly life for spiritual pursuit

Saraswatimata: Hindu goddess of learning

Sardar: Military commander.

Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav: Public celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi

Sarvodaya: Gandhian vision of social upliftment.

Sattvic: A *guna* (quality) symbolising purity, harmony, and balance

Satyagraha: Nonviolent struggle for truth

Saurseni Apabrahmsha: Medieval Indo-Aryan language precursor to Hindi.

Savarna: Touchables or upper castes within the varna system

Shaktism: Worship of the divine feminine

Shastras: Scriptures

Shringarras: Aesthetic mood of romantic love in classical Indian art and literature.

Shuddhi movement: Hindu reform movement for reconversion

Shudra: The fourth and lowest varna in the traditional caste hierarchy,

Swaraj: Self-rule

Tabligh movement: Islamic missionary movements.

Tamasha: Folk performance styles from Maharashtra

Tamasic: One of the three *gunas* (qualities) in Indian philosophy, representing inertia, ignorance, and darkness.

Tanzim movement: Islamic missionary and organisational movements that focused on strengthening religious identity, defending Muslim minority rights, etc.

Ulema: Islamic scholars

Upanishad: Philosophical texts exploring the nature of reality and self, part of the Vedas.

Vairagya: Renunciation or detachment from worldly pleasures.

Varna: Caste

Varnashram: Fourfold caste system

Varnavyavastha: Caste system

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: A Sanskrit phrase meaning the world is one family

Vedanta: Philosophical school based on the end portion of the Vedas, focusing on metaphysics and self-realisation

Vedas**:** Ancient Hindu scriptures comprising hymns, rituals, and philosophical teachings.

Vishwaguru: World teacher

Watan: Hereditary land or office

Zamindar: Landlord

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