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## Nation as A Moral Community: Reinterpreting Subhas Chandra Bose's Ethical Vision of Nationalism

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the changing nature of nationalism in India by revisiting the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose. It aims to reinterpret nationalism as an ethical and democratic project. Most studies explain nationalism as a historical or sociological concept. In contrast, this study places Bose's ideas within normative political theory. This approach highlights their moral and philosophical foundations. Bose viewed the nation as a moral community. His idea was based on ethical responsibility, civic participation, and collective sacrifice. This vision offers an alternative to the growing trend of state-centric and exclusionary nationalism. Such nationalism is often marked by identity-based divisions, political polarisation, and enforced loyalty. The study follows a qualitative and descriptive-analytical method. It uses both primary writings and secondary sources. Key themes include moral nationalism, dissent, secularism, and the distinction between nation and government. The analysis shows that dissent is a democratic virtue in Bose's thought. Secularism serves as the ethical basis of the state. A clear separation between nation and government is essential for protecting democratic citizenship. The paper argues that Bose's inclusive and ethical nationalism remains relevant today. It provides a corrective framework for current political discourse. It supports values such as justice, pluralism, and accountability. The study contributes to normative



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political theory by presenting nationalism as an ethical category, not merely a tool of state power.

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## INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary India, nationalism is undergoing a significant conceptual transformation. It is shifting from an ethical and emancipatory ideal towards an increasingly instrumentalised political discourse shaped by loyalty, obedience, and identity mobilisation. As a result, the boundary between patriotism and conformity is becoming blurred, where dissent is often recast as disloyalty. This indicates a deeper shift in which nationalism functions less as a moral commitment and more as an instrument of political control (Billig, 1995; Foucault, 1977).

This transformation is reflected in recent political developments, including debates around citizenship policies such as CAA/NRC, the labelling of dissenting voices as “anti-national,” and the growing scrutiny of student movements. Scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot and Ramachandra Guha argue that these trends signal a shift from civic nationalism towards ethno-cultural majoritarianism (Jaffrelot, 2021; Guha, 2017). Consequently, nationalism is being reconfigured from an inclusive political ideal into a mechanism of identity-based consolidation. The crisis is further deepened by the conflation of nation with the state, which narrows the scope of democratic citizenship. State-centric nationalism prioritises uniformity and obedience over diversity and participation, thereby marginalising plural voices (Sen, 2005; Nussbaum, 2012). Despite extensive scholarship on nationalism, its ethical and normative dimensions remain underexplored, creating a critical gap in contemporary political theory.

It is within this context that the thought of Subhas Chandra Bose becomes particularly relevant. Bose conceptualised the nation as a moral community, grounded in sacrifice, discipline, and inclusive solidarity. He distinguished between the nation as an ethical entity and the government as a political institution, thereby preserving space for dissent, accountability, and democratic citizenship. His vision of nationalism emphasises ethical responsibility and collective welfare rather than mere allegiance to state power.

Reinterpreting Bose’s ethical nationalism thus provides a normative framework to critically engage with contemporary exclusionary and state-centric tendencies. Accordingly, this study analyses the concept of moral nationalism in Bose’s thought, examines the distinction between nation and government and its implications for democratic citizenship, and evaluates its contemporary relevance in addressing the ongoing crisis of nationalism in India.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are to analyse the concept of moral nationalism in the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose; to critically examine the distinction between nation and government and its implications for democratic citizenship; and to evaluate the contemporary relevance of Netaji's nationalism in addressing the crisis of exclusionary and state-centric nationalism in India.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

In order to fulfil the objectives of the study, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How does Netaji conceptualise nationalism as a moral and ethical responsibility?
2. What is the significance of dissent and secularism in his nationalist framework?
3. How can his ideas serve as a corrective to contemporary distortions of nationalism?

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

The existing scholarly works on Subhas Chandra Bose has largely focused on his role as a revolutionary nationalist, his leadership of the Indian National Army (INA), and his position within anti-colonial politics. However, the moral and ethical foundations of his nationalism have received comparatively limited systematic attention. Early biographical works such as Leonard A. Gordon's *Brothers Against the Raj* (1990) trace Bose's political evolution and highlight influences like Swami Vivekananda, emphasising duty, sacrifice, and service. Similarly, Sugata Bose's *His Majesty's Opponent* (2011) presents him as a visionary leader guided by ethical commitments to freedom and collective well-being. Scholars such as Romain Hayes examine his international alliances within the framework of strategic anti-colonialism, noting the tension between moral ideals and political pragmatism. Another strand of research, including Bimal Prasad and Anita Inder Singh, analyses his vision of socialism and state-building, highlighting concerns for economic justice, equality, and social welfare. The ethical and spiritual dimensions of his thought are further evident in works edited by Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose, which emphasise discipline, sacrifice, and moral character in nation-building, particularly in speeches such as the Haripura Presidential Address (1938). More recent research works, including Rudrangshu Mukherjee, interprets Bose's nationalism as inclusive and civic, stressing unity across religious and social divisions and reinforcing his secular outlook. In addition, Amiya Bose highlights the intellectual depth of Bose's political thought, emphasising its engagement with modernity and its grounding in ethical and cultural traditions; S. R. Mehrotra situates Bose within the broader dynamics of Congress politics and underscores his critique of gradualist nationalism; R.C. Majumdar interprets his



approach as a radical and activist alternative within the Indian freedom movement; and Nirode K. Barooah analyses his ideology as an action-oriented nationalism rooted in leadership, discipline, and collective mobilisation. At the same time, critical perspectives question the coherence of his moral framework, particularly in relation to his engagement with authoritarian regimes during World War II. Overall, the literature establishes Bose as a complex thinker whose nationalism integrates spirituality, socialism, and militant anti-imperialism. However, it reveals a significant gap in explicitly theorising his idea of the nation as a moral community, as ethics is often treated as implicit rather than central. This study seeks to address that gap by systematically analysing Bose's ethical vision of nationalism and demonstrating how concepts such as sacrifice, justice, unity, and moral responsibility shape his understanding of the nation.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

The present analysis is situated within normative political theory. It treats nationalism as an ethical project shaped by values, responsibility, and democratic ideals. The framework has three levels: normative, institutional, and discursive. At the normative level, moral nationalism goes beyond emotional patriotism and state-centric loyalty. It defines the nation as a moral community based on ethical responsibility and civic commitment. In the thought of Subhas Chandra Bose, the nation is a moral force shaped by unity, sacrifice, and active participation. Nationalism thus becomes a disciplined ethical practice. This idea resonates with John Rawls' concept of justice.

At the institutional level, the framework connects the ethical state with democratic citizenship. The state is guided by justice, equality, and secularism. Citizenship involves participation, critical reasoning, and dissent. This aligns with Jürgen Habermas' idea of communicative action. At the discursive level, the framework examines how nationalism is shaped through identity and power. It focuses on contexts where conformity is prioritised over plurality. Here, the distinction between nation and government becomes important. It allows critique of the state without weakening the nation. Overall, the framework provides a clear lens to reinterpret Bose's thought and analyse contemporary exclusionary nationalism.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and analytical research design within normative political theory. It examines the ethical dimensions of nationalism in the thought of Subhas Chandra Bose. Given the conceptual nature of the study, it relies on textual interpretation, conceptual analysis, and



critical hermeneutics rather than quantitative methods. An interpretive-normative approach is followed, combining textual exegesis with contextual analysis. A text–context framework is used to situate Bose’s ideas within both historical and contemporary settings. Primary sources include his writings and speeches, especially *The Indian Struggle* and *An Indian Pilgrim*. These are analysed to identify themes such as moral nationalism, dissent, secularism, and the distinction between nation and government. The study also engages with theoretical contributions by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Partha Chatterjee. Constitutional provisions, particularly Article 19(1)(a), are used to link nationalism with democratic citizenship and dissent. The study uses thematic analysis and comparative interpretation. A hermeneutic approach helps interpret Bose’s ideas across contexts. A critical perspective is applied to assess their relevance in contemporary nationalism. This approach ensures clarity and supports the normative rethinking of nationalism as an ethical and democratic project.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. NATIONALISM AS MORAL RESPONSIBILITY:

In the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose, nationalism transcends emotional patriotism and emerges as an ethical and purposive project grounded in responsibility, sacrifice, and moral conviction (Bose, 1935; Bose, 1948). It rejects the reduction of nationalism to sentimental attachment or symbolic loyalty. Instead, it conceptualises the nation as a moral community sustained by shared ethical consciousness and active civic participation, rather than coercive authority or institutional structures (Bose, 1935).

While this perspective resonates with the modernist and constructivist approaches of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, it advances a distinctly normative position (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). In this view, the legitimacy of the nation derives from moral commitment rather than structural necessity. Freedom itself is understood as a form of moral struggle. This is reflected in Netaji’s assertion that “India cannot achieve her freedom without intense struggle, sacrifice and suffering” (Bose, 1935), and further reinforced by his claim that “freedom is not given, it is taken” (Bose, 1948). These ideas underscore the inseparability of nationalism from active struggle and ethical determination.

In this sense, nationalism becomes an ongoing moral practice. It demands courage, critical consciousness, and the subordination of individual interests to collective purpose (Bose, 1935). Although this aligns in part with the ethical traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar (Gandhi, 1927; Ambedkar, 1947), Bose’s emphasis on organised struggle and disciplined sacrifice lends his thought a



distinctive philosophical intensity. Unlike Gandhi's emphasis on moral restraint or Rabindranath Tagore's scepticism towards aggressive nationalism (Tagore, 1917), Bose advances an activist form of moral nationalism. This form is rooted in disciplined collective action and seeks to reconcile nationalism with a broader ethical universalism.

Consequently, nationalism is elevated from sentiment to moral duty. It redefines citizenship as active ethical engagement in the creation of a just, inclusive, and democratically grounded political community. It also suggests that when nationalism ceases to be ethical, it risks becoming indistinguishable from domination (Bose, 1935; Anderson, 1983).

## **2. DISSENT AS DEMOCRATIC STRENGTH:**

In the political philosophy of Subhas Chandra Bose, dissent is not an aberration within nationalism but one of its most vital democratic foundations (Bose, 1964). It reflects a deep commitment to intellectual freedom, ethical responsibility, and participatory citizenship. It also rejects the reduction of nationalism to silent obedience or unquestioning loyalty.

Netaji articulated a vision in which the strength of a nation is measured not by uniformity of opinion, but by its capacity to accommodate principled disagreement and critical reasoning (Bose, 1964). This conviction found concrete expression in his resignation from the presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1939, despite commanding majority support. Through this act, he prioritised ideological integrity over institutional power (Bose, 1964). His subsequent formation of the Forward Bloc further demonstrated that dissent, when constructively channelled, can function as a regenerative force within democratic politics rather than a disruptive one (Bose, 1964).

In this sense, dissent is elevated to a civic virtue. It aligns with democratic theories advanced by Robert A. Dahl and Jürgen Habermas on the indispensability of disagreement in sustaining political legitimacy (Dahl, 1971; Habermas, 1984). It also resonates with John Stuart Mill's defence of liberty, where dissent and diversity of opinion are essential for truth and democratic vitality. As Mill argues, "silencing dissent robs society of truth" (Mill, 1859).

Equally significant is Netaji's claim that "freedom is not merely political freedom; it is the freedom of the mind and soul" (Bose, 1948). This elevates freedom of thought and expression to the ethical core of nationalism. It also anticipates constitutional guarantees such as Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, as well as judicial interpretations by the Supreme Court that affirm the centrality of free speech to democratic life.



Contemporary developments, including student-led movements and wider civil society protests, further highlight the continuing relevance of dissent as a site of democratic negotiation rather than disloyalty. This position also aligns with the concept of constitutional morality articulated by B. R. Ambedkar, where the right to question authority is intrinsic to responsible citizenship (Ambedkar, 1949).

By embedding dissent within the moral architecture of nationalism, Netaji offers a powerful normative critique of contemporary tendencies that equate disagreement with disloyalty. His broader philosophical insight that “one individual may die for an idea, but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives” (Bose, 1948) reinforces the enduring and transformative power of ideas sustained through critical engagement.

His thought thus redefines nationalism as an open and dialogic process. Here, unity is achieved through reasoned engagement rather than imposed conformity. It affirms that dissent is not a fracture in the nation, but the very condition of its democratic vitality.

### **3. SECULARISM AS THE ETHICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STATE:**

In the political philosophy of Subhas Chandra Bose, secularism is not a derivative constitutional addition but the ethical foundation of nationalism itself (Bose, 1948). It is indispensable for sustaining unity within a deeply plural society. This is reflected in his clear assertion—well before its formal incorporation through the 42nd Amendment (1976)—that “religion is a personal matter; it must not be mixed with politics” (Bose, 1948). This position establishes a principled separation between faith and state power.

This formulation is both normatively and structurally significant. The politicisation of religion in a diverse society transforms citizenship into a hierarchy of identities. It reduces democracy to majoritarian contestation and erodes the ethical basis of the state (Bhargava, 1998; Sen, 2005). In contrast, Netaji articulates an inclusive nationalism grounded in civic duty rather than religious belonging. Here, unity emerges from shared political commitment rather than cultural homogeneity (Bose, 1948). This principle found concrete expression in the reorganisation of the Indian National Army in 1943. Individuals from diverse religious backgrounds were united by a common national oath. This demonstrates that secularism functions as a lived political ethic rather than an abstract doctrine (Bose, 1964).

At the theoretical level, this understanding invites comparison with broader models of secularism. Unlike Western secularism, which is often premised on strict separation between religion and state, the



Indian model allows for context-sensitive engagement with religion while maintaining a normative commitment to equality and justice. Rajeev Bhargava conceptualises this as “principled distance” (Bhargava, 1998). This position is further reinforced by Amartya Sen, who emphasises pluralism and public reasoning as central to democratic life (Sen, 2005). It also aligns with the idea of constitutional morality articulated by B. R. Ambedkar (Ambedkar, 1949).

Yet, Netaji’s contribution remains distinctive. He embeds secularism within the moral architecture of nationalism itself, rather than treating it as a mere institutional or legal safeguard (Bose, 1948). In doing so, he advances a model that is ethical, inclusive, and action-oriented. His insight that the fusion of religion with politics transforms nationalism into an instrument of exclusion anticipates contemporary concerns regarding the erosion of secular values in democratic life (Bose, 1948; Sen, 2005).

Secularism thus emerges not simply as a constitutional principle but as a moral imperative. It is essential for preserving democratic integrity, safeguarding pluralism, and sustaining the ethical unity of the nation. In this sense, it offers a powerful normative response to exclusionary and state-centric forms of nationalism.

#### **4. NATION VS GOVERNMENT: A DEMOCRATIC DISTINCTION**

A crucial dimension of the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose lies in his clear distinction between the nation and the government (Bose, 1948). He conceptualises the nation as a moral force, while the government is understood as a temporary political institution. This distinction is central to democratic citizenship. The nation, in this view, is an ethical community rooted in shared history, collective memory, and moral aspiration, rather than an extension of state power. The government, by contrast, remains contingent and changeable (Bose, 1948).

This distinction acquires strong normative significance in contexts where regimes conflate their authority with the nation. Such conflation delegitimises dissent and recasts criticism as anti-national. Netaji challenges this tendency by asserting that opposition to a government may, in fact, represent a deeper loyalty to the nation. This is historically evident in the anti-colonial struggle (Bose, 1948). His assertion that “no real change in history has ever been achieved by discussions” further underscores that moral commitment to the nation may require active resistance against unjust authority (Bose, 1964). At the same time, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) institutionalises



the right to critique the state as an essential component of responsible citizenship. This reinforces the democratic legitimacy of dissent within a constitutional framework.

Theoretically, this position resonates with democratic frameworks of public reasoning and accountability advanced by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1984). It also aligns with Hannah Arendt's distinction between authority and power, which cautions against the monopolisation of political legitimacy by the state (Arendt, 1969). Furthermore, it is consistent with B. R. Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality (Ambedkar, 1949). It also echoes Ernest Renan's conception of the nation as a "daily plebiscite," where national legitimacy rests on the continuous consent and participation of citizens rather than state authority (Renan, 1882).

In this context, when the state claims to embody the nation, democracy begins to erode. The conflation of state and nation produces a hegemonic form of nationalism that delegitimises democratic critique. Yet, Netaji's contribution remains distinctive in embedding this principle within nationalism itself. He asserts that "a nation is not merely a territory or a government; it is an idea, a moral force that lives in the hearts of its people" (Bose, 1948).

In contemporary contexts of state-centric nationalism, this distinction acquires renewed significance. It challenges the equation of patriotism with obedience and redefines citizenship as active, critical, and ethically grounded engagement with political authority.

## **5. CONTEMPORARY CRISIS OF NATIONALISM**

In contemporary India, nationalism is undergoing a critical transformation. It is shifting from an ethical and inclusive ideal into a strategically instrumentalised discourse of power (Jaffrelot, 2021; Guha, 2017). Political legitimacy is increasingly constructed through the mobilisation of identity, emotion, and division. As a result, nationalism is no longer functioning as a shared civic responsibility. Instead, it is being reshaped into a mechanism of control characterised by "us versus them" binaries, implicit loyalty tests, and the conflation of conformity with patriotism (Billig, 1995).

This transformation represents not merely a discursive shift but a deeper structural reconfiguration of democratic life. In this process, dissent is marginalised, plurality is problematised, and citizenship is reduced to performative allegiance (Foucault, 1977; Mounk, 2018). The trend is reflected in intensifying political polarisation and the growing use of nationalist rhetoric in electoral mobilisation. This indicates a shift from civic nationalism towards identity-driven political consolidation. Such



developments are often conceptualised as democratic backsliding, majoritarian constitutionalism, and populist nationalism (Mounk, 2018).

Empirical assessments further reinforce this concern. Reports by international indices such as V-Dem and Freedom House point to a decline in liberal democratic indicators and a contraction of civic space in India (V-Dem, 2023; Freedom House, 2023). These developments align with the critical insights of Michel Foucault and Michael Billig, who demonstrate how states deploy nationalist narratives to regulate political behaviour and consolidate authority (Foucault, 1977; Billig, 1995). In doing so, they blur the boundary between civic belonging and ideological control.

Contemporary scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot and Ramachandra Guha similarly highlight the growing centrality of majoritarian narratives and identity-based polarisation in Indian politics (Jaffrelot, 2021; Guha, 2017). This trajectory also resonates with broader theoretical concerns articulated by Yascha Mounk regarding the rise of populist forms of democratic erosion (Mounk, 2018).

The implications of this shift are profound. The systematic production of division along religious, linguistic, and cultural lines fragments the social fabric. It normalises exclusion as a mode of governance and redefines nationalism as a contested domain where difference is treated as suspicion and dissent as disloyalty (Nussbaum, 2012; Sen, 2005). Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen caution that such developments are detrimental to pluralism, democratic integrity, and social cohesion.

In this context, modern nationalism increasingly operates as a technology of power rather than a language of belonging (Foucault, 1977). It marks a decisive shift from ethical responsibility towards a politics of dominance. Here, the symbolic authority of the nation is appropriated to sustain political control. This necessitates a critical re-engagement with alternative frameworks. The political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose offers one such framework. It reimagines nationalism as an inclusive, ethical, and democratically grounded project capable of resisting state-centric and exclusionary distortions (Bose, 1948).

## **6. NETAJI AS CORRECTIVE MODEL**

In the context of the contemporary crisis of exclusionary and state-centric nationalism, the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose offers a compelling normative corrective (Bose, 1948). It is grounded in ethical inclusiveness, civic unity, and democratic responsibility. This perspective challenges dominant nationalist narratives based on cultural homogenisation and identity-based exclusion. Instead, it



advances an inclusive vision of the nation as a moral community, where unity emerges from a shared commitment to justice rather than imposed conformity (Bose, 1948).

This vision was not merely theoretical but historically embodied. One example is the nationwide mobilisation during the INA trials of 1945, which witnessed unprecedented mass political participation across regions and communities (Sarkar, 1983). Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs came together in a shared expression of anti-colonial solidarity. This unity was further reinforced by the 1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny, where widespread unrest among Indian naval personnel in Bombay and other centres signalled resistance to colonial authority and the emergence of a broader nationalist consciousness transcending communal divisions (Sarkar, 1983). These events illustrate how ethical mobilisation rooted in unity and shared sacrifice can generate powerful forms of counter-hegemonic nationalism beyond identity-based fragmentation. Scholars such as Leonard A. Gordon note that Netaji's leadership embodied a distinctive synthesis of ideological commitment and mass mobilisation (Gordon, 1990). This reinforces the practical viability of his ethical nationalism as a lived political force. By grounding nationalism in civic responsibility rather than identity politics, Netaji redefines it as a moral force capable of generating solidarity across difference. In doing so, he effectively counters the contemporary "us versus them" paradigm (Bose, 1948).

Theoretically, this corrective aligns with pluralist and cosmopolitan critiques advanced by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, who emphasise inclusive identity and ethical citizenship (Sen, 2005; Nussbaum, 2012). However, Netaji's contribution remains distinctive in its fusion of moral commitment with organised political action. His insistence that nationalism must be anchored in moral courage rather than enforced loyalty anticipates contemporary concerns regarding the erosion of democratic values under majoritarian and state-driven pressures (Bose, 1948).

As he himself reflected, "reality is, after all, too big for our frail understanding to fully comprehend" (Bose, 1948), underscoring the depth and complexity of his philosophical outlook. In this sense, his thought offers not only a critique of existing distortions but also a constructive framework. It reimagines nationalism as an ethical and participatory project grounded in unity in diversity, civic duty, and moral accountability.

Thus, this analysis directly addresses the third research question. It demonstrates the enduring relevance of Bose's thought for developing a more inclusive, democratic, and ethically grounded conception of the nation.



## 7. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF BOSE'S ETHICAL NATIONALISM:

While the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose offers a powerful ethical vision of nationalism, it also raises important questions within liberal democratic theory (Bose, 1948). These concerns relate to the tension between disciplined collective mobilisation and individual autonomy. Hannah Arendt cautions that the concentration of political will may constrain plurality (Arendt, 1969). Similarly, Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty highlights the potential limits on individual freedom within collective projects (Berlin, 1969). Together, these perspectives foreground the broader tension between individual and collective conceptions of freedom.

In this context, Bose's emphasis on discipline, unity, and organised mobilisation may appear to privilege collective purpose over individual autonomy (Bose, 1948). However, when situated within the context of colonial domination, such discipline functioned as a necessary instrument of liberation rather than a form of authoritarian control (Bose, 1948). As Leonard A. Gordon observes, Netaji's leadership combined ideological commitment with mass mobilisation (Gordon, 1990). This demonstrates that ethically grounded collective action can coexist with democratic aspirations.

These tensions, therefore, do not diminish Bose's contribution. Instead, they reinforce its contemporary relevance. They invite a reinterpretation of his thought within a democratic framework that balances ethical nationalism with pluralism, accountability, and individual freedom.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the political thought of Subhas Chandra Bose offers a profound normative reorientation of nationalism. It transforms nationalism from a discourse of power and identity into an ethical and democratic project grounded in responsibility, inclusiveness, and moral courage.

Netaji's conception of the nation as a moral community redefines citizenship as active ethical participation rather than passive allegiance. In doing so, it challenges contemporary state-centric and exclusionary forms of nationalism characterised by identity-based polarisation, performative loyalty, and the instrumentalisation of patriotic discourse. His framework foregrounds dissent as a democratic virtue essential for accountability. It establishes secularism as the ethical foundation of the state, ensuring unity within diversity. It also emphasises the distinction between nation and government as a critical safeguard of democratic citizenship. This affirms that critique of authority does not constitute disloyalty to the nation.



In contrast, contemporary nationalism increasingly operates through the politics of division and ideological control. It erodes pluralism and weakens the moral foundations of democratic life. Against this backdrop, Netaji's nationalism emerges as a compelling corrective paradigm. It transcends divisive identities by grounding unity in civic responsibility, moral commitment, and collective purpose. It thus offers a theoretically robust framework for reimagining nationalism as an ethical and participatory project.

In light of these insights, nationalism must be redefined within an ethical and constitutional framework. In such a framework, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity actively shape political practice. Correspondingly, educational institutions must cultivate civic ethics and critical democratic consciousness. Media institutions must promote responsible and inclusive narratives of nationalism. The judiciary must remain vigilant in safeguarding dissent as a foundational democratic right. At the same time, the application of Netaji's model within contemporary democratic frameworks requires a careful balance. It must reconcile ethical mobilisation with institutional pluralism. This ensures that the pursuit of unity does not override democratic diversity.

Ultimately, Netaji's political thought offers not only a historical legacy but also a normative framework for reconstructing democratic nationalism in the twenty-first century. It suggests that the true strength of a nation lies not in enforced unity, but in its capacity to sustain ethical plurality through democratic conviction. Therefore, the enduring relevance of Subhas Chandra Bose lies in his ability to reimagine nationalism as an ethical and participatory project, where unity is achieved not through conformity, but through democratic conviction and moral responsibility.

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