



The Political Philosophy of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee: Nationalism and Federalism

Dr. Pankaj Kumar Mandal

Associate Professor, Department of History, Ramsaday College, Amta, Howrah, Email:
pankajmandalbrsc@gmail.com

Abstract: *In the political history of contemporary India, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901–1953) has a prominent position. He was a notable educationist, attorney, member of parliament, and political figure who had a significant impact on India's early years of independence. His political thought emphasized constitutional democracy, national integration, cultural identity, and federal governance in addition to a strong devotion to Indian nationalism. Dr. Mukherjee established the conceptual groundwork for a political tradition that still has an impact on Indian politics as the founding of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951. Dr. Mukherjee's political philosophy developed amid a time of colonial control, Partition trauma, intercommunal strife, and the difficulty of establishing a democratic nation-state. Concerns regarding economic growth, constitutional governance, national unity, minority rights, and the Union's connection with the states were all represented in his thinking. Despite his support for a federal system, he maintained that India's integrity and sovereignty necessitated a powerful central government that could safeguard the country's unity. The political philosophy of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee is examined in this essay, with particular attention to his ideas of federalism and nationalism. It also examines the intellectual influences on his political philosophy, his opinions on national integration, democracy, and constitutionalism, and evaluates the concepts' ongoing applicability in modern India.*

Keywords: *Political Philosophy, National Integration, Democracy, Nation-State, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.*

Introduction: On July 6, 1901, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was born in Calcutta into a family of intellectually accomplished Bengalis. As the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, his father, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, was a highly esteemed educationist in India. At the age of thirty-three, Mukherjee became one of the youngest Vice-Chancellors of the University of Calcutta after exhibiting academic prowess from a young age. His idea that education was crucial for societal advancement and nation-building was shaped by his academic career. Mukherjee entered politics thru the Bengal Legislative Council during British control. Later on, he worked for the provincial government and actively participated in discussions about national integration, constitutional amendments, and community representation. He was appointed Minister of Industry and Supply in Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet following India's independence. However, he resigned in 1950 due to ideological disagreements, particularly with reference to Jammu and Kashmir and relations with Pakistan. He established the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, promoting a different political outlook built on constitutional democracy, national unity, and cultural nationalism.

Foundations of Mukherjee's Political Philosophy: The constitutional principles of democracy, India's civilizational legacy, and the real-world difficulties of nation-building in the years before and after

independence all influenced Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's political thought. His beliefs changed in reaction to the need to create a stable democratic state, sectarian conflicts, colonial authority, and India's partition. Mukherjee expressed his political worldview thru speeches, parliamentary debates, public publications, and political activity rather than creating a formal philosophical system. National unity, cultural identity, constitutional governance, democratic values, and balanced federalism served as his guiding ideals. Mukherjee's view of the nation as a cultural and historical entity rather than just a political or territorial unit was one of the main tenets of his political theory. He saw India as an old civilization whose varied linguistic, religious, and regional communities were bound together by an enduring cultural history. He believed that without a strong sense of national identity based on India's common civilizational past, political independence would be meaningless. His idea of cultural nationalism, which highlighted national unity while acknowledging the nation's social and cultural variety, was based on this conviction.

Additionally, Mukherjee placed a high value on constitutional democracy. He was adamant that democratic institutions, parliamentary administration, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law should be the cornerstones of India's future. He supported constitutional means of settling political conflicts and defending citizens' rights, in contrast to revolutionary approaches to political change. He saw democracy as a system that protected civil freedoms, promoted political engagement, and guaranteed accountability through parliamentary debate and a strong opposition, in addition to being a means of choosing governments. Equal citizenship was another key tenet of his political philosophy. Mukherjee maintained that everyone should have equal rights and protection under the Constitution, regardless of their caste, religion, language, or geographic location. He was against political structures that, in his opinion, caused citizens to be treated differently depending on local or community factors. He thought that promoting national cohesion and bolstering democratic government required equality before the law and a shared set of constitutional rights. Another important tenet of Mukherjee's worldview was national integration. His political philosophy was greatly impacted by India's Partition, which persuaded him that sectarian divides were a major danger to the stability of the country. He maintained that the recently formed country should develop a strong sense of national identity that went beyond regional and religious allegiances. He believed that in order to stop future fragmentation and create a unified nation-state, policies that supported integration, emotional unity, and constitutional equality were essential.

Mukherjee's attempt to strike a balance between regional diversity and national unity was evident in his approach to federalism. Although he was in favor of India's federal system, he thought the Union government should have enough constitutional power to protect national growth, preserve territorial integrity, and protect sovereignty. He acknowledged the significance of state governments in meeting local needs and maintaining regional identities at the same time. His vision foresaw what is sometimes referred to as cooperative federalism, in which the Union and the states cooperate for the advancement of the country while operating within their respective constitutional domains. A key element of his political thought was economic independence. In addition to an active but constrained role for the state, Mukherjee supported industrialization, technological advancement, and the promotion of private enterprise. He supported a mixed economy in which public and private sectors complemented one another to promote economic growth, employment, and national development. He believed that economic strength was indispensable for political independence and national security. Because of his illustrious academic career, education held a special place in Mukherjee's mind. As a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta and an educationist, he believed that education was the cornerstone of responsible and informed citizens. In addition to promoting the study of India's intellectual and cultural traditions, he underlined the need of contemporary scientific and technical education. According to Mukherjee, universities were more than just places to study; they were also establishments that shaped the character of the country and prepared its future leaders. Mukherjee's steadfast dedication to constitutionalism and public service served as the foundation for all of these ideas. According to him, political power must continue to be answerable to democratic institutions and function within the bounds of the Constitution. His resignation from the Union Cabinet over policy differences

demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice political office for ideological convictions, reflecting his belief that constitutional principles and national interest should take precedence over personal or partisan considerations. Cultural nationalism, constitutional democracy, equal citizenship, national integration, cooperative federalism, economic self-reliance, educational advancement, and the rule of law were the fundamental tenets of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's political philosophy. Together, these ideas influenced his conception of India as a cohesive, democratic, and deeply cultural country. His theories are still a crucial component of the study of contemporary Indian political philosophy and continue to have an impact on debates about nationalism, federalism, and constitutional governance, despite the fact that academics continue to disagree on several parts of his political philosophy.

Concept of Nationalism: Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's political thought was based on nationalism. India's lengthy civilizational history, cultural continuity, and constitutional unity served as the foundation for his conception of nationalism. Mukherjee saw India as an old civilization whose different people had been united by shared historical experiences, cultural traditions, and a sense of belonging, in contrast to ideas of nationalism focused mainly on ethnicity, race, or language. For him, the country was a cultural and historical community that had developed over centuries rather than just a political or geographical entity. Mukherjee thought that India's national journey had just begun with the country's political freedom in 1947. In his view, genuine nation-building required the development of emotional integration and a strong national consciousness among citizens. He argued that political freedom would remain incomplete unless people identified themselves first and foremost as members of one united nation, transcending divisions of religion, caste, language, and region. National unity, therefore, was not simply a constitutional arrangement but a shared commitment to the sovereignty, integrity, and collective welfare of India.

Mukherjee's emphasis on cultural nationalism was a defining characteristic of his nationalism. He maintained that India's civilizational legacy, which had developed over centuries of philosophical ideas, spiritual practices, literature, art, and social structures, was fundamental to the country's identity. Despite the country's extreme variety, he claimed that this cultural base served as the cornerstone for national cohesion. According to him, Indian culture has historically shown that it is capable of absorbing various influences while maintaining a consistent civilizational character. In this way, he saw cultural heritage as a unifying factor that enhanced democratic nationhood rather than undermined it. Nationalism was not defined by Mukherjee in terms of religion alone. Despite his numerous references to India's cultural traditions, he insisted that all of its residents, regardless of their community or religion, were equal members of the Indian nation. He underlined that national allegiance should be prioritized over communal or sectarian connections and that all citizens should have equal access to constitutional rights and obligations. As a result, his vision of nationalism was intimately associated with the idea of equal citizenship, which held that every person had the right to equal legal protection and chances to engage in public life.

Mukherjee's conception of nationalism was significantly impacted by the Partition experience. He was persuaded that political mobilization based on religious identification could jeopardize social harmony and national unity when British India was divided into India and Pakistan. Because of this, he continuously opposed policies that, in his opinion, fostered intercommunal strife or undermined the feeling of a shared national identity. In his view, the recently formed Republic of India ought to advance national integration and constitutional equality while steering clear of policies that could strengthen distinct political identities based on geography or religion. The significance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity was also highlighted in Mukherjee's vision of nationalism. He thought that the uniform application of constitutional principles across the nation was essential to India's unity. His hostility to the unique constitutional status that the former State of Jammu and Kashmir had been accorded under Article 370 of the Constitution was the most obvious manifestation of this conviction. He maintained that diverse constitutional structures could jeopardize political unification and that a single sovereign nation should be controlled by a single national framework and Constitution. His famous catchphrase, "Ek Desh Mein Do Vidhan, Do Nishan, Do Pradhan

Nahin Challenge” (“One country cannot have two constitutions, two flags, and two prime ministers”), represented his dedication to both geographical and constitutional unity.

Mukherjee’s nationalism also had a strong connection to democracy and constitutional government. He thought that democratic institutions, public involvement, and the rule of law should be the foundation for maintaining national unity rather than force or authoritarianism. He believed that civil freedoms, free elections, an independent judiciary, and parliamentary democracy were necessary for a powerful and cohesive country. He argued that the legitimacy of the constitutional system would be strengthened and citizens’ sense of national belonging would be reinforced by their faith in democratic institutions. Additionally, Mukherjee linked nationalism to the growth and independence of the country. He maintained that advancements in science, industry, education, and the economy must all contribute to political independence. Only when a country was strong economically and able to provide for its citizens could it maintain its sovereignty. As a result, he supported policies that encouraged collaboration between the public and private sectors and supported indigenous industry, technical advancement, and balanced economic development.

Mukherjee’s notion of nationalism placed a high value on education. As a distinguished educationist and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, he held the opinion that educational establishments ought to foster civic engagement, patriotism, and an understanding of India’s cultural legacy. He also stressed the value of current knowledge, critical thinking, and scientific investigation. He believed that education was essential for creating knowledgeable citizens who could support democratic governance and the advancement of the country. Mukherjee’s definition of nationalism has sparked a lot of academic discussion. His emphasis on national unification, constitutional equality, and cultural continuity, according to supporters, offered a cogent framework for fortifying the recently formed Indian state. They contend that his support for equal citizenship and national cohesion aimed to foster a common civic identity while bridging the gaps that had led to Partition. However, some argue that his cultural nationalism can be construed in a variety of ways and have questioned whether or not his focus on a shared cultural legacy accurately represented India’s religious and cultural diversity. These divergent interpretations are still a part of larger debates in Indian political philosophy.

Despite these debates, Mukherjee’s concept of nationalism remains an important subject of academic study because of its enduring influence on Indian political discourse. His ideas have shaped discussions on national integration, constitutional equality, Centre–State relations, and the relationship between cultural identity and democratic citizenship. The political movement he founded, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and its ideological successors have drawn upon many of these principles in articulating their understanding of Indian nationhood.

Cultural Nationalism: Mukherjee’s focus on cultural nationalism was one of his most notable achievements. He maintained that rather than colonial institutions, Indian nationalism had its roots in the nation’s ancient civilization. As stated by him: India’s civilization existed before the contemporary nation-state. Political unity is strengthened by cultural unity. Every community should be a part of the national identity. Within a shared national framework, religious plurality ought to coexist. According to Mukherjee, Indian culture has traditionally assimilated various customs while preserving civilizational continuity. His interpretation of religious exclusivism was different from that of cultural nationalism. He maintained that all citizens should participate in a shared national identity and enjoy equal constitutional rights, regardless of their religious beliefs.

National Integration: Mukherjee’s political philosophy was significantly impacted by the Partition of India. He thought that measures that promoted religious separatist should be avoided in an independent India and saw Partition as a terrible result of communal politics. According to Mukherjee, national integration necessitated: equal citizenship. Uniform implementation of constitutional values, removal of separatist

inclinations, robust national institutions. Citizens' emotional integration. He thought that only when people saw themselves primarily as Indians could democracy thrive.

Jammu and Kashmir: Mukherjee's resistance to Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status was one of the hallmarks of his political career. According to him, "One nation cannot have two constitutions, two prime ministers, and two flags." According to Mukherjee, several constitutional systems promoted political separatism and undermined national unity. He was arrested in 1953 as a result of his demonstrations against the permission system that controlled access to Jammu and Kashmir. He passed away in custody under circumstances that are still the subject of historical debate. Despite having different political views, his effort had a big impact on later discussions about constitutional unity.

Federalism in Mukherjee's Political Thought: Federalism played a significant role in Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's political thought. His political philosophy did not reject the federal principle, despite the fact that he is well known for his fervent support of a strong Union government and national unity. Instead, Mukherjee envisioned a type of federalism that aimed to balance national unity with regional autonomy. He thought that a federal system of government was necessary due to India's enormous geographic extent, cultural variety, linguistic plurality, and historical complexity. At the same time, he maintained that a powerful and efficient central government was necessary for the country's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Therefore, it is possible to characterize his idea of federalism as one that struck a balance between constitutional unity and decentralization. The historical context of India's independence influenced Mukherjee's opinions on federalism. After emerging from colonial domination, the nation had to deal with the trauma of Partition, intercommunal violence, widespread refugee migrations, and the integration of multiple princely states. These difficulties persuaded him that India needed a strong constitutional framework that could uphold political order while honoring regional diversity. He thought that while a properly strengthened Union administration may maintain the Republic's unity without eradicating the states' constitutional role, excessive decentralization could damage national cohesiveness and foster separatist.

The idea that the Constitution should clearly divide powers between the Union and the states while upholding the central government's authority on issues impacting the security and integrity of the nation was fundamental to Mukherjee's conception of federalism. Although he acknowledged the federal nature of the Indian Constitution, he stressed that the Union should have adequate power over defense, foreign policy, national security, money, interstate commerce, and other matters of national significance. He believed that these authorities were necessary to guaranty both coordinated national development and political stability. Mukherjee did not support excessive centralization or the weakening of state governments, even if he favored a powerful central government. He recognized that India's geographical diversity necessitated state administrations with the ability to effectively address local concerns. He thought that state authorities were more suited to handle issues like agriculture, education, public health, local government, culture, and rural development since they were more familiar with local situations. He maintained that rather than needless concentration of power, effective governance relied on collaboration across various governmental levels.

Mukherjee's idea of national integration was intimately linked to his view of federalism. Instead of operating as rival political entities, he thought that India's states should be essential parts of a single sovereign nation. Regional identities should be respected and acknowledged, but they shouldn't take precedence over national identities. Mukherjee asserts that the Constitution established the institutional framework necessary for the coexistence of regional diversity and national unity. Therefore, the federal system was designed to assist effective administration within a unified constitutional order rather than to promote political fragmentation. The issue of Jammu and Kashmir occupies a central place in any discussion of Mukherjee's federal thought. He strongly opposed the special constitutional status accorded to the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution. Mukherjee argued that a federal system should not permit constitutional arrangements that, in his opinion, weakened the political integration of the nation. His

opposition stemmed from his belief that all states within the Union should share a common constitutional framework while enjoying autonomy in matters specifically assigned to them by the Constitution. His famous slogan, “Ek Desh Mein Do Vidhan, Do Nishan, Do Pradhan Nahin Challenge” (“One country cannot have two constitutions, two flags, and two prime ministers”), reflected his conviction that constitutional uniformity in matters of sovereignty was essential for preserving national unity.

Mukherjee also linked federalism with the principle of equal citizenship. He believed that citizens should enjoy the same constitutional rights and obligations regardless of the state in which they resided. In his view, differential constitutional arrangements that created varying political rights or institutional structures could undermine the idea of equal citizenship and weaken national integration. Consequently, he supported a constitutional order in which all citizens were treated equally before the law while state governments exercised their powers within the framework established by the Constitution. Economic considerations also influenced Mukherjee’s federal philosophy. He argued that balanced national development required cooperation between the Union and the states. The central government, he believed, should formulate broad national economic policies, invest in infrastructure, promote industrialization, and coordinate development programmes. At the same time, state governments should retain adequate authority to implement policies suited to their economic resources, agricultural conditions, and local developmental priorities. Such cooperation, according to Mukherjee, would reduce regional disparities and strengthen the economic foundations of national unity.

Mukherjee emphasized the importance of constitutional methods for resolving disputes between the Union and the states. Rather than encouraging political confrontation, he advocated dialogue, parliamentary deliberation, judicial review, and adherence to constitutional procedures. He regarded the judiciary as an impartial institution capable of interpreting the Constitution and maintaining the balance of powers within the federal system. His commitment to constitutionalism reinforced his belief that federal relations should be governed by law rather than political expediency. His parliamentary speeches consistently reflected respect for democratic institutions and cooperative governance. Mukherjee believed that a healthy federal system required mutual trust, accountability, and constitutional responsibility on the part of both the Union and the states. He rejected authoritarian centralization while simultaneously warning against forms of regionalism or separatism that could threaten national sovereignty. In this respect, his federal philosophy sought to combine democratic decentralization with effective national leadership.

Political scholars have interpreted Mukherjee’s conception of federalism in different ways. Many describe it as a model of cooperative federalism, in which both the Union and the states possess constitutionally defined powers and responsibilities while working together to achieve common national objectives. Others characterize it as integrative federalism, emphasizing that the federal structure should reinforce rather than dilute national unity. These interpretations suggest that Mukherjee viewed federalism primarily as an instrument for strengthening the Indian nation-state rather than as a mechanism for maximizing regional autonomy.

Critics have argued that Mukherjee’s emphasis on a strong Centre could potentially reduce the scope of state autonomy and encourage centralization. They contend that India’s linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity requires substantial decentralization to ensure effective democratic representation. Supporters, however, maintain that his approach reflected the extraordinary circumstances confronting newly independent India and that his insistence on a strong Union was motivated by concerns for national security, constitutional stability, and territorial integrity rather than by opposition to federal governance itself. The continuing relevance of Mukherjee’s federal thought is evident in contemporary debates concerning Centre–State relations, fiscal federalism, regional development, and constitutional governance. Discussions on the distribution of legislative powers, financial devolution, intergovernmental cooperation, and national integration continue to engage with issues that occupied a central place in his political philosophy. While

constitutional practice has evolved over time, his emphasis on balancing national unity with regional diversity remains a significant contribution to Indian political thought.

Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's idea of federalism aimed to balance two essential goals of the Indian constitutional order: acknowledging the states' rightful place in democratic government while maintaining the nation's unity and sovereignty. His concept of a federal system included equal citizenship, constitutional supremacy, cooperative intergovernmental ties, meaningful state autonomy in regional affairs, and a powerful but legally constrained Union government. His strategy was based on the belief that federalism should be used to promote national unity rather than political division and that India's diversity could thrive under a single constitutional framework. His federal philosophy is still a significant viewpoint in the study of Indian constitutional formation and political philosophy, despite ongoing disagreements among academics.

Conclusion: In the development of contemporary Indian political philosophy, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee has a significant position. In order to create a cohesive vision for an independent India, his thought aimed to integrate nationalism, constitutional democracy, federalism, cultural identity, and equal citizenship. He acknowledged the importance of state sovereignty within the bounds of the constitution, even as he promoted a powerful Union administration to maintain territorial integrity and national unity. His focus on economic growth, educational improvement, parliamentary democracy, and the rule of law was indicative of his larger dedication to nation-building. Mukherjee's views on nationalism sprang from the conviction that India's civilizational legacy could accommodate its social and cultural diversity while offering a shared foundation for political unification. His support of national integration, equal citizenship, and constitutional governance still has an impact on academic and popular discourse. However, historians and political theorists continue to disagree on how to interpret several of his ideas, especially his opinions on cultural nationalism and center-state relations. Dr. Mukherjee's political philosophy continues to be a crucial point of reference in conversations on Indian nationalism, federalism, constitutionalism, and democratic government more than 70 years after his passing. Whether seen positively or negatively, his contributions have had a long-lasting influence on the development of Indian political concepts and continue to influence discussions over the nature and prospects of the Indian republic.

References

- Basu, D. D. (2018). Introduction to the Constitution of India (25th ed.). LexisNexis.
- Bharatiya Jana Sangh. (1952). Principles, policies and programme of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Bharatiya Jana Sangh.
- Constituent Assembly of India. (1950). The Constitution of India. Government of India.
- Craig, B. (2020). Hindu nationalism and Indian politics: The origins and development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Routledge.
- Graham, B. D. (1990). Hindu nationalism and Indian politics: The origins and development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Cambridge University Press.
- Guha, R. (2007). India after Gandhi: The history of the world's largest democracy. Picador.
- Jaffrelot, C. (1996). The Hindu nationalist movement and Indian politics. Penguin Books.
- Mukherjee, S. P. (1952). Speeches and writings of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee (Vols. 1–2). Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

- Mukherjee, S. P. (1990). Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: His death in detention. Suruchi Prakashan.
- Noorani, A. G. (2011). Article 370: A constitutional history of Jammu and Kashmir. Oxford University Press.
- Sarkar, S. (1983). Modern India: 1885–1947. Macmillan.
- Smith, D. E. (1963). India as a secular state. Princeton University Press.

Citation: Mandal. P. K., (2026) “The Political Philosophy of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee: Nationalism and Federalism”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-08, August-2026.