

The concept of civil society in India's nationalist movement: Gandhi's alternative modernity

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Mario López Areu is a Professor in the Department of International Relations at Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid. He has been a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and the Nepä School of Social Sciences and Humanities in Kathmandu.

Some of his relevant publications include: *El pensamiento politico indio moderno: un estudio conceptual* (CEPC, 2018), “Los orígenes de la modernidad en el pensamiento politico indio (1858-1909)” (2019), “Historiographic reception and approaches to political thought in contemporary India” (2018) and “El populismo hinduista de Narendra Modi: reimaginando la nación india” (2018).

Paper proposal:

In modern Western political thought, the concept of civil society develops within the historical context of the European Absolutist State. Faced with the presence of an omnipresent sovereign, civil society aims to limit that state power and open up a space for individual liberty.

The historical context for the development of the concept of civil society in modern India was very different. Faced with the absence of stable state sovereignty, religion comes to be the guarantor of the social and economic order through the Hindu caste system.

Taking that differing historical reality as our starting point, this paper aims to examine the development of the concept of civil society in modern Indian political thought. To do so, we will examine the reception of the Western concept in India and its reconceptualisation on the basis of a localised understanding of how to harmonise the principles of civility and individual liberty. For this purpose we will examine and compare the two societal ideals that came to dominate the Indian nationalist discourse in the first half of the 20th century: those of Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar on the one hand and Mohandas K. Gandhi on the other.

Through this comparison we aim to illustrate the originality of Gandhi's political project, solidly founded in Indian traditions, but not traditional, but rather an alternative form of modernity to that proposed in the West.

For our study we will make ample use of the writings and speeches of the three thinkers.