

Cheddi Jagan as the 'Father of the Nation' of Guyana: Myth and Reality

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Abstract—Cheddi Jagan remains one of the most influential and debated political leaders in the history of Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Widely regarded by his supporters as the "Father of the Nation," his legacy is closely associated with the anti-colonial movement, democratic politics, social justice, and national development. At the same time, his leadership continues to generate debate because of Cold War intervention, ideological differences, and the persistence of ethnic politics in Guyana. This study critically examines the historical basis and political construction of Jagan's national image by exploring the relationship between leadership, nationalism, political myth, and collective memory. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on historical and interpretive analysis. It draws on peer-reviewed literature, scholarly books, archival records, official reports, and Cheddi Jagan's own writings to examine competing interpretations of his political legacy. The analysis is guided by the theoretical perspectives of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory to explain how Jagan's reputation has evolved within changing political and historical contexts. The findings show that Jagan played a decisive role in promoting anti-colonial nationalism, expanding democratic participation, and advocating social and economic equality. However, his political legacy was also shaped by Cold War geopolitics, foreign intervention, and growing ethnic polarisation, making his image both respected and contested. The study argues that the title "Father of the Nation" reflects both historical achievement and symbolic political construction. It concludes that Jagan's legacy cannot be understood solely through political events but must also be examined through the ways in which history, memory, and national identity interact in postcolonial societies. By integrating historical analysis with contemporary theoretical perspectives, the study contributes to broader debates on political leadership, democratic legitimacy, and nation-building in the Global South.

Index Terms—Cheddi Jagan, Guyana, Father of the Nation, Nationalism, Political Myth, Collective Memory, Nation-Building, Cold War, Ethnic Politics, Democratic Leadership

I. Introduction

The emergence of new nations after the end of colonial rule brought significant political, social, and economic challenges. Many newly independent states looked to strong political leaders to unite diverse populations, establish democratic institutions, and build a shared national identity. In this process, some leaders came to be recognised as "Fathers of the Nation" because of their contributions to independence and state-building. Such titles, however, are often shaped by historical interpretation, political ideology, and public memory rather than by unanimous national agreement. As a result, the legacy of these leaders frequently becomes the subject of continuing scholarly and political debate.

Guyana presents an important case for examining this relationship between leadership, nationalism, and historical memory. As a former British colony with a diverse ethnic composition, Guyana experienced a complex transition from colonial rule to independence. The country's political development was influenced not only by domestic social and economic challenges but also by Cold War rivalry, external intervention, and growing ethnic polarisation. These factors shaped both the process of nation-building and the public

image of its political leaders. Understanding these historical conditions is essential for evaluating the role of individuals in the creation of the modern Guyanese state.

Cheddi Jagan remains one of the most influential figures in Guyana's political history. As the co-founder of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), he played a leading role in the struggle for self-government, universal suffrage, and social justice. His political philosophy combined anti-colonial nationalism with democratic socialism, emphasising equality, workers' rights, and national sovereignty. Throughout his political career, Jagan consistently argued that independence should improve the lives of ordinary people rather than simply replace colonial rulers with local elites. His commitment to democratic politics, despite repeated political setbacks and foreign intervention, strengthened his reputation as a principled nationalist leader.

At the same time, Jagan's political career remains deeply contested. His socialist orientation generated concern among Britain and the United States during the Cold War, leading to direct political intervention in British Guiana. The suspension of the elected government in 1953 and continued external involvement in Guyanese politics significantly influenced his political career and the country's democratic development. Domestic political divisions also intensified during this period, particularly after the split between Jagan and Forbes Burnham. Over time, political competition increasingly reflected ethnic divisions between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese communities, making Jagan's legacy both nationally significant and politically contested.

The title "Father of the Nation" has therefore become more than a simple historical recognition. It reflects broader debates about nationalism, political legitimacy, collective memory, and leadership in postcolonial societies. For many Guyanese, Jagan symbolises resistance against colonialism, commitment to democracy, and dedication to social justice. Others argue that his legacy cannot be separated from the political polarisation and ethnic divisions that shaped post-independence Guyana. These contrasting interpretations demonstrate that national memory is not fixed but is continuously reconstructed through political discourse, public institutions, and changing historical perspectives.

Existing scholarship has made important contributions to understanding Jagan's role in Guyana's political development. Studies have examined his socialist ideology, anti-colonial activism, Cold War politics, democratic leadership, and ethnic relations. However, most research addresses these themes separately. Limited attention has been given to understanding how Jagan's image as the "Father of the Nation" has been constructed through the combined perspectives of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory. Similarly, relatively few studies integrate historical developments, theoretical perspectives, and contemporary political debates into a single analytical framework.

This study addresses these gaps by critically examining both the historical foundations and the symbolic construction of Cheddi Jagan's national legacy. Rather than accepting or rejecting the title "Father of the Nation," the article investigates how this image emerged, how it has evolved over time, and why it continues to shape political identity and public debate in Guyana. The analysis combines historical evidence with theories of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory to provide a balanced assessment of Jagan's achievements, limitations, and continuing influence.

By doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions on political leadership and nation-building in postcolonial societies. The findings demonstrate that national leaders are remembered not only for their political achievements but also through evolving historical narratives, public memory, and changing political contexts. The case of Cheddi Jagan therefore offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between leadership, democracy, identity, and national memory in Guyana and the wider Global South.

II. Literature Review

The political life and legacy of Cheddi Jagan have attracted scholarly attention from historians, political scientists, and Caribbean studies researchers. Most studies examine his role in Guyana's independence movement, socialist ideology, Cold War politics, ethnic relations, and democratic leadership. However, relatively few studies critically evaluate the construction of Jagan's image as the "Father of the Nation" by combining perspectives from nationalism, political myth, and collective memory. This review examines the major themes in the existing literature and identifies the research gap addressed by the present study.

Early scholarship focused mainly on Jagan's contribution to Guyana's anti-colonial movement. In *The West on Trial*, Jagan presented his own account of British colonial rule, arguing that political independence should be accompanied by social justice, economic equality, and democratic participation. His writings portray nationalism as a struggle against colonial exploitation rather than merely the transfer of political power. These works remain important primary sources for understanding his political philosophy, although they naturally reflect his own political perspective.

Historical studies by Thomas J. Spinner provides one of the earliest comprehensive analyses of modern Guyanese politics. Spinner explains the emergence of mass politics, the formation of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), and the constitutional crisis of the 1950s. His work shows how Jagan transformed colonial politics by mobilising workers, farmers, and trade unions. At the same time, Spinner argues that increasing political rivalry and ethnic divisions complicated the process of national integration.

Research on Guyanese political economy has been shaped by the work of Clive Y. Thomas. Thomas argues that postcolonial development in Guyana cannot be understood without considering structural economic inequality, colonial dependency, and class relations. His analysis links political leadership with broader economic structures and demonstrates that many challenges faced by Jagan continued after independence. Thomas emphasises that political leadership alone cannot overcome institutional and economic constraints inherited from colonial rule.

Studies of Caribbean political thought by Percy Hintzen, Paget Henry, Brian Meeks, and Anthony Payne broaden the discussion by placing Guyana within wider regional developments. These scholars argue that Caribbean nationalism developed through a combination of anti-colonial resistance, social reform, and struggles over political legitimacy. Their work shows that leadership in newly independent Caribbean states was shaped by both domestic conditions and international pressures. However, these studies generally examine regional trends rather than focusing specifically on Jagan's symbolic national status.

The Cold War remains one of the most widely studied aspects of Jagan's political career. Stephen G. Rabe's research on United States intervention in British Guiana demonstrates how geopolitical competition strongly influenced domestic politics. Drawing on declassified government documents, Rabe argues that the United States viewed Jagan's socialist orientation as a strategic threat in the Western Hemisphere. British and American intervention significantly influenced electoral politics, constitutional development, and the balance of political power in Guyana. Odd Arne Westad similarly places Guyana within the broader global Cold War, showing how ideological rivalry affected newly independent states across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Another major theme concerns ethnicity and political competition. Ralph Premdas, Percy Hintzen, and Selwyn Ryan argue that ethnic identity became one of the defining features of Guyanese politics after the split between Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham. Their studies explain how Indo-Guyanese and

Afro-Guyanese political identities gradually became associated with competing political parties. These scholars suggest that colonial institutions, electoral competition, and political mobilisation reinforced ethnic polarisation. While they provide valuable explanations of ethnic politics, they pay less attention to how historical memory has shaped Jagan's public image over time.

Research on nationalism offers another important perspective. Benedict Anderson argues that nations are "imagined communities" created through shared history, symbols, and collective identity. Eric Hobsbawm further explains that national traditions are often constructed to strengthen political legitimacy. Anthony D. Smith emphasises the importance of historical memory, myths, and cultural identity in sustaining national consciousness. These theories help explain why political leaders frequently become symbols of the nation. However, they have rarely been applied directly to the case of Cheddi Jagan.

The literature on political myth also contributes to understanding Jagan's legacy. Chiara Bottici argues that political myths are narratives that provide meaning to collective political life rather than simply false stories. Christopher Flood similarly explains that political myths shape public understanding of leadership, sacrifice, and national identity. These perspectives suggest that the image of the "Father of the Nation" should be understood as a political construction that reflects changing historical interpretations rather than an uncontested historical fact.

Collective memory provides another useful analytical framework. Maurice Halbwachs argues that societies remember the past through shared social frameworks, while Jan Assmann emphasises the role of institutions, education, monuments, and cultural practices in preserving political memory. Applied to Guyana, these theories explain how public commemorations, official narratives, and political discourse have helped maintain Jagan's national image across generations. Yet few studies have examined how competing memories of Jagan differ among Guyana's ethnic and political communities.

Recent scholarship by Clem Seecharan has renewed interest in Jagan's historical role by reassessing his political career within the wider context of the Cold War and decolonisation. Seecharan argues that Jagan's leadership cannot be understood solely through ideological debates because it was also shaped by colonial institutions, international intervention, and domestic political divisions. His work provides a more balanced interpretation than earlier studies that either celebrated or criticised Jagan without fully considering the historical context.

Although the existing literature is extensive, several important gaps remain. First, most studies examine Jagan either as a nationalist leader, a socialist politician, or a Cold War figure, but rarely integrate these perspectives into a single analytical framework. Second, relatively little research critically examines the construction of Jagan's image as the "Father of the Nation" through the combined lenses of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory. Third, recent political developments in Guyana, including democratic consolidation and economic transformation following major oil discoveries, have created new contexts for reassessing Jagan's legacy. Finally, existing scholarship often emphasises political events rather than examining how competing historical narratives continue to influence national identity and political legitimacy.

The present study addresses these gaps by integrating theories of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory with historical and political analysis. Rather than asking whether Cheddi Jagan deserves the title of "Father of the Nation," the study examines how this image was constructed, why it continues to influence Guyanese politics, and how competing interpretations reflect broader debates about leadership, democracy, ethnicity, and nation-building in postcolonial societies. This approach provides a more comprehensive

understanding of Jagan's legacy while contributing to wider discussions on political leadership and national identity in the Global South.

III. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on historical and interpretive analysis to examine Cheddi Jagan's role as the "Father of the Nation" of Guyana. It relies on secondary data collected from government reports, archival records, peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, speeches, and official publications related to Guyana's political history, decolonisation, nationalism, and Cold War politics. The study also draws on Cheddi Jagan's own writings to understand his political ideas and leadership philosophy. The collected literature is critically reviewed to identify recurring themes, competing interpretations, and areas of scholarly agreement and disagreement. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of Jagan's political legacy within its historical and political context.

The analysis is guided by the concepts of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory to interpret how Jagan's image has been constructed and debated over time. A thematic content analysis is used to examine the relationship between political leadership, ethnic politics, foreign intervention, and nation-building in Guyana. The study compares different scholarly perspectives rather than relying on a single interpretation, allowing a balanced assessment of both the achievements and criticisms associated with Jagan's legacy. By combining historical evidence with established theoretical perspectives, the study develops an objective and evidence-based explanation of why Cheddi Jagan continues to occupy a central place in Guyana's national identity and political discourse.

IV. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the political legacy of Cheddi Jagan and assess the historical basis of his recognition as the "Father of the Nation" of Co-operative Republic of Guyana. The study explores how Jagan's leadership influenced the country's anti-colonial movement, democratic development, and nation-building process. It also analyses the role of his nationalist vision, socialist ideology, and commitment to social justice in shaping modern Guyanese politics. By examining these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a balanced understanding of Jagan's contributions within their historical and political context.

The study further aims to analyse how political myth, nationalism, and collective memory have shaped public perceptions of Cheddi Jagan's leadership over time. It evaluates the influence of Cold War intervention, ethnic politics, and competing historical narratives on the interpretation of his legacy. In addition, the study compares differing scholarly perspectives to identify areas of agreement and debate, thereby addressing existing gaps in the literature. Through this analysis, the research contributes to broader discussions on political leadership, postcolonial nation-building, democratic legitimacy, and national identity in Guyana and other postcolonial societies.

V. Cheddi Jagan, Nationalism, and the Making of Modern Guyana

Cheddi Jagan played a major role in shaping the political identity of Co-operative Republic of Guyana during the colonial and postcolonial periods. His political ideas combined anti-colonial nationalism with socialist principles. Through this combination, he attempted to create a political movement that represented workers, farmers, and poor communities across ethnic divisions. His contribution became

important because British Guiana during the 1940s and 1950s was deeply unequal. Political power and economic resources were concentrated in the hands of colonial elites and foreign business interests.

Jagan believed that political independence alone was not enough. He argued that true freedom required economic justice, social equality, and political participation for ordinary citizens. This thinking was strongly influenced by Marxist and socialist ideas that he encountered while studying in the United States. However, Jagan adapted these ideas to the local conditions of Guyana rather than copying foreign political models directly. He focused especially on sugar plantation workers, rural farmers, and urban labourers who had long faced poverty and exploitation under colonial rule.

In 1950, Jagan and Janet Jagan helped establish the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The party became the first major mass political organisation in British Guiana. Unlike earlier elite-led political groups, the PPP mobilised large sections of society through trade unions, village meetings, political education, and public campaigns. The party promoted universal adult suffrage, workers' rights, land reforms, better wages, and self-government. These demands connected nationalism with social justice and made the independence movement more inclusive.

One important aspect of Jagan's nationalism was his effort to create multiethnic unity. In the early years, the PPP included both Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese leaders. Jagan believed that colonialism had divided communities and that national unity was necessary for independence. However, ethnic tensions increased during the 1950s, especially after the split between Jagan and Forbes Burnham. This division later shaped Guyana's ethnic political system, where parties became associated with specific communities.

Cold War politics also influenced Jagan's political journey. The British and the United States feared that his socialist ideas could turn Guyana into a communist state similar to Cuba after the Cuban Revolution. In 1953, after the PPP won elections, the British suspended the constitution and removed Jagan's government. Foreign intervention weakened his political agenda and delayed Guyana's path toward independence. Still, Jagan continued to advocate democratic politics and constitutional methods.

Despite political setbacks, Jagan's ideas shaped modern Guyanese political culture. He introduced mass participation into politics and made issues such as inequality, labor rights, and national sovereignty central to public debate. His speeches and writings promoted the idea that political leadership should serve ordinary people rather than elites. This image helped him gain long-term support among working-class communities.

At the same time, critics argue that Jagan's socialist orientation sometimes ignored economic realities and increased foreign suspicion toward Guyana. Others believe that he failed to fully control the ethnic polarisation that later dominated national politics. Even so, most historians agree that Jagan transformed politics in Guyana by connecting nationalism with social reform and democratic participation.

Today, Jagan remains one of the most influential political figures in Caribbean history. His legacy continues to shape debates on democracy, nationalism, and development in Guyana. His political career reflects both the achievements and limitations of postcolonial leadership in the developing world.

VI. Cold War Intervention and the Political Legacy of Cheddi Jagan

The political career of Cheddi Jagan was deeply shaped by Cold War politics. During the 1950s and 1960s, the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union influenced many newly emerging states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In this global environment, Jagan's socialist ideas created fear among Western powers, especially the United States and Britain. Although Jagan mainly focused on economic

justice, labour rights, and anti-colonial nationalism, foreign governments increasingly viewed him as a possible communist threat in the Caribbean region.

Jagan's political image became closely linked with Marxism after he openly criticised colonial capitalism and supported socialist reforms. His writings and speeches emphasised class inequality, foreign economic domination, and workers' rights. This ideological position attracted support among labour groups and poor communities in British Guiana. However, it also attracted international suspicion during the Cold War period.

The victory of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in the 1953 elections became a major turning point. The PPP had won democratic elections under a new constitution introduced by Britain. Yet within months, the British government suspended the constitution and removed Jagan's administration. British authorities argued that the PPP threatened colonial stability and could establish a communist-oriented state. This intervention damaged Guyana's democratic process and transformed Jagan into a controversial international figure.

The role of the United States became even more important after the Cuban Revolution in Cuba. Washington feared that another left-leaning government in the Caribbean could strengthen Soviet influence near the American mainland. As a result, the United States increased diplomatic and covert involvement in British Guiana during the early 1960s. Declassified documents later revealed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supported anti-Jagan political groups and labour unrest to weaken his government.

This foreign intervention had major consequences for Jagan's political image. Supporters saw him as a victim of imperialism and external interference. They argued that democratic principles were ignored because Western powers prioritised Cold War strategy over self-determination. Jagan himself repeatedly claimed that Guyana's independence movement was disrupted by external powers afraid of socialist reforms.

At the same time, critics argued that Jagan underestimated the geopolitical realities of the Cold War. His public admiration for socialist countries and his Marxist language increased international concerns. Some scholars believe that he failed to present his policies in a way that reassured Western governments and local middle-class groups. This allowed opponents to portray him as a radical leader who could destabilise the region.

The Cold War also changed Guyana's internal politics. Ethnic tensions between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese communities intensified during this period. Political competition between Jagan and Forbes Burnham became linked with global ideological rivalry. Foreign involvement further deepened mistrust and polarisation inside Guyana. As a result, national politics became increasingly divided along ethnic and ideological lines.

Despite these challenges, Jagan's political reputation improved significantly after the end of the Cold War. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, global attitudes toward socialist leaders had changed. Jagan also adopted more moderate economic policies and emphasised democratic governance. In 1992, he became President of Guyana after internationally recognised free elections. This victory restored his democratic legitimacy and strengthened his historical image as a nationalist leader who had struggled against both colonialism and foreign interference.

Today, many historians argue that Cold War intervention prevented Guyana from developing a more stable democratic path during the independence period. Jagan's legacy is therefore shaped by both his political ideas and the international forces that opposed him. His career reflects how global ideological conflicts

influenced local politics in postcolonial societies. The Cold War did not only affect Guyana's foreign relations; it also reshaped leadership, democracy, and national identity within the country. As a result, Jagan remains both a respected nationalist figure and a symbol of the broader struggles faced by small states during the Cold War era.

VII. Image of Jagan and Its Impact on Ethnic and Party Politics in Guyana

The image of Cheddi Jagan as the "Father of the Nation" has had a deep influence on ethnic and party politics in Guyana. His supporters view him as the main architect of anti-colonial nationalism, democratic struggle, and social justice. However, his political legacy is also closely connected with the rise of ethnic political divisions between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese communities. As a result, Jagan's image has remained both inspirational and controversial in Guyanese politics.

During the early 1950s, Jagan attempted to build a multiethnic political movement through the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The party included Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, workers, trade unions, and rural communities. At that stage, Jagan promoted national unity against colonial rule rather than ethnic politics. His message focused on economic inequality, labour rights, and self-government. This helped the PPP gain broad support across different social groups.

However, ethnic tensions increased after the political split between Jagan and Forbes Burnham in 1955. Burnham later established the People's National Congress (PNC), which gradually became associated mainly with Afro-Guyanese voters. In contrast, the PPP increasingly drew support from Indo-Guyanese communities. This division transformed Guyanese politics into a largely ethnic party system that continued for decades.

The image of Jagan as the "Father of the Nation" strengthened loyalty among many Indo-Guyanese supporters. For them, Jagan represented resistance against colonialism, foreign interference, and political exclusion. His long years in opposition and his commitment to democratic politics increased his symbolic importance. Many supporters viewed him not only as a political leader but also as a defender of community identity and dignity.

At the same time, sections of the Afro-Guyanese population viewed Jagan differently. Some believed that his politics mainly favoured Indo-Guyanese interests despite his public commitment to national unity. Cold War propaganda and political competition further intensified these perceptions during the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, political identity in Guyana became closely connected with ethnic identity.

Scholars argue that Jagan's image became part of a larger political culture where historical memory and ethnic loyalty strongly influenced voting behaviour. Elections often reflected ethnic alignment rather than policy debates alone. The PPP and PNC developed strong community-based support structures that reinforced political polarisation. This pattern limited the growth of issue-based politics and reduced opportunities for broader national consensus.

Despite these divisions, Jagan's political image also had positive effects on democratic development. He consistently defended electoral democracy and constitutional governance even during periods of political repression. His return to power in 1992 through free elections became an important symbol of democratic restoration in Guyana. Many citizens across ethnic lines respected his personal honesty and simple lifestyle.

Over time, younger generations and civil society groups have increasingly questioned ethnic political divisions in Guyana. Some scholars argue that the continued use of Jagan's image in party politics sometimes reinforces old political loyalties instead of encouraging national reconciliation. Others believe

that his broader message of social justice and democratic participation still remains relevant beyond ethnic boundaries.

Economic changes have also influenced political perceptions. The discovery of major oil reserves in Guyana has increased debates about national unity, resource distribution, and inclusive governance. In this context, historical political figures such as Jagan continue to shape public discussions about fairness, development, and political representation.

Today, Jagan's legacy remains deeply embedded in Guyanese political culture. Streets, institutions, and national events continue to honour his memory. At the same time, his image remains politically contested because different groups interpret his role in different ways. For supporters, he symbolises democracy, nationalism, and social equality. For critics, his legacy is linked with the rise of ethnic party politics and long-term political polarisation.

Therefore, the image of Cheddi Jagan as the "Father of the Nation" has had a lasting impact on both national identity and ethnic politics in Guyana. His political legacy reflects the broader challenges faced by many postcolonial societies where nationalism, democracy, and ethnicity became closely interconnected.

VIII. Political Myth, Nationalism, & Collective Memory in Understanding Cheddi Jagan's Legacy

The political legacy of Cheddi Jagan can be better understood through the ideas of political myth, nationalism, and collective memory. These concepts help explain why Jagan remains one of the most respected and debated leaders in Guyana. His image goes beyond ordinary political leadership because different groups remember and interpret his role in different ways. Over time, his legacy became connected with national identity, democratic struggle, and social justice.

Political myth does not mean a false story. In political studies, it refers to a symbolic narrative that gives meaning to national history and political identity. Political myths often simplify complex historical events and present leaders as symbols of unity, sacrifice, or resistance. In Guyana, Jagan's image developed into such a political symbol. Supporters viewed him as a leader who fought colonial rule, defended democracy, and represented poor and working-class citizens.

Jagan's political reputation was shaped strongly by the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s. Through the People's Progressive Party (PPP), he promoted independence, workers' rights, and national sovereignty. These ideas connected him closely with Guyanese nationalism. Nationalist movements in many postcolonial societies often create heroic images around leaders who challenged foreign domination. Jagan's long struggle against British colonial rule and foreign intervention helped strengthen his status as a national figure.

The Cold War period further increased the symbolic importance of Jagan. After the British removed his government in 1953, many supporters saw him as a victim of imperialism and external interference. His political suffering and years in opposition created an image of sacrifice and perseverance. Such narratives are important in political myth-making because they transform political leaders into moral symbols rather than ordinary politicians.

Collective memory also plays a major role in shaping Jagan's legacy. Collective memory refers to how societies remember the past through public institutions, education, political speeches, monuments, and national ceremonies. In Guyana, roads, airports, research centres, and memorial events continue to honour Jagan's contribution to the nation. These public representations help preserve his image across generations.

At the same time, collective memory is never fully neutral. Different communities remember historical events differently based on political experiences and ethnic identity. Many Indo-Guyanese communities strongly celebrate Jagan as the protector of democracy and equality. However, some Afro-Guyanese groups interpret his political legacy more critically because of the ethnic polarisation that emerged during the postcolonial period. As a result, memories of Jagan remain politically contested.

Nationalism also shaped the way Jagan is remembered in Guyanese history. He promoted the idea that independence should include economic justice, political participation, and national dignity. His nationalism was linked not only with political freedom but also with social transformation. This made him different from leaders who focused mainly on formal independence without wider social reforms.

However, scholars argue that nationalist narratives sometimes simplify historical realities. Jagan is often presented as the central figure in Guyana's national development, while the contributions of leaders such as Forbes Burnham receive less attention in some political narratives. Critics therefore argue that political memory can become selective and shaped by party interests.

The idea of Jagan as the "Father of the Nation" also reflects the emotional side of politics. Political symbols create feelings of belonging, loyalty, and identity among citizens. For many Guyanese, especially older generations, Jagan represents honesty, sacrifice, and commitment to ordinary people. His simple lifestyle and long years of political struggle strengthened this perception.

In recent years, younger scholars have tried to study Jagan's legacy in a more balanced way. Instead of viewing him only as a hero or only as a divisive figure, they analyse both his achievements and limitations. This approach recognises that political leaders operate within difficult historical conditions shaped by colonialism, Cold War rivalry, and ethnic tensions.

Today, Jagan remains one of the strongest political symbols in Caribbean political history. His legacy continues to influence debates about democracy, nationalism, identity, and social justice in Guyana. Through political myth, collective memory, and nationalism, his image has become deeply connected with the story of the Guyanese nation itself.

IX. Leadership, and Nation-Building in Postcolonial States

The political career of Cheddi Jagan provides important insights into leadership and nation-building in postcolonial states. His experience shows how newly independent countries faced difficult challenges related to colonial legacies, ethnic divisions, economic inequality, and foreign intervention. Jagan's political journey reflects the broader struggles experienced by many leaders in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean during the twentieth century.

One major lesson from Jagan's case is that postcolonial leadership often combines nationalism with social reform. Jagan believed that political independence alone was not enough for real freedom. He argued that independence should also improve economic equality, workers' rights, education, and political participation. Through the People's Progressive Party (PPP), he tried to create a mass political movement representing ordinary citizens rather than colonial elites.

This approach was common among many postcolonial leaders who linked nationalism with social justice. Similar patterns appeared in countries such as India, Ghana, and Tanzania, where leaders attempted to combine national independence with economic transformation. Jagan's case therefore shows that postcolonial nation-building was not only about creating new states but also about reshaping society.

A comparison with other postcolonial leaders further highlights both the strengths and the uniqueness of Cheddi Jagan's leadership. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Jagan viewed political freedom as inseparable from social justice and public participation. Both leaders mobilised ordinary people against colonial rule and promoted non-violent democratic politics. Similar to Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Jagan believed that political independence should be followed by economic transformation, national self-reliance, and social equality. Their leadership reflected a shared commitment to combining nationalism with developmental goals, although each worked within different political and economic conditions.

Jagan's experience also shares important similarities with Patrice Lumumba and Nelson Mandela, whose political careers were strongly influenced by external intervention and domestic political conflict. Like Lumumba, Jagan faced intense pressure from foreign powers because his political ideology was viewed through the lens of Cold War rivalry. Both leaders became symbols of anti-imperialist resistance, although Lumumba's leadership ended abruptly through assassination, while Jagan remained committed to constitutional politics and eventually returned to office through democratic elections. Mandela's leadership, in contrast, focused on national reconciliation after decades of racial conflict. Although Guyana's political divisions differed from South Africa's, both leaders recognised that lasting nation-building required democratic institutions and inclusive political participation rather than political domination.

A useful contrast can also be drawn with Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. Lee emphasised rapid economic development, state capacity, and administrative efficiency, often accepting restrictions on political competition to achieve national stability. Jagan followed a different path by consistently defending electoral democracy and civil liberties despite long periods of political exclusion. These comparisons demonstrate that there is no single model of postcolonial leadership. While Gandhi, Nkrumah, Lumumba, Nyerere, Mandela, Lee Kuan Yew, and Jagan all sought to strengthen their newly emerging states, they adopted different political strategies shaped by their historical circumstances. Jagan's contribution therefore lies not only in his role in Guyana's independence movement but also in his continued commitment to democratic governance, social justice, and national sovereignty under exceptionally difficult domestic and international conditions.

Another important lesson is the difficulty of building national unity in ethnically divided societies. Although Jagan initially promoted multiethnic politics, Guyana gradually became divided between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese political identities. The split between Jagan and Forbes Burnham increased political polarisation during the 1950s. Over time, political parties became closely linked with ethnic communities.

This pattern reflects a wider problem in many postcolonial societies where colonial systems had already created ethnic divisions through labour policies, unequal development, and administrative structures. After independence, political competition often strengthened these divisions instead of reducing them. Jagan's experience therefore demonstrates that nation-building in postcolonial states requires more than nationalist slogans. It also requires inclusive institutions and trust across communities.

Jagan's career also highlights the impact of international politics on postcolonial leadership. During the Cold War, powerful states frequently intervened in smaller countries because of ideological rivalry between capitalism and socialism. Jagan's socialist ideas created suspicion in the United States and Britain. Foreign intervention weakened his government and shaped Guyana's political future.

This experience was not unique to Guyana. Leaders such as Patrice Lumumba in Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana also faced external pressure during the Cold War. These cases

show that postcolonial states often struggled to maintain political independence in a world dominated by global power competition.

At the same time, Jagan's political legacy demonstrates the importance of democratic commitment. Even after years of political exclusion, he continued to support elections and constitutional politics. His return to power in 1992 through democratic elections became a major symbol of democratic restoration in Guyana. This contrasts with several postcolonial leaders who turned toward authoritarian rule after independence.

Jagan's simple lifestyle and public honesty also shaped his political image. In many postcolonial societies, corruption and elite politics weakened public trust in government. Jagan's reputation for personal integrity helped him maintain support over several decades. This suggests that moral leadership can play an important role in nation-building, especially in societies facing economic hardship and political instability.

However, Jagan's case also reveals the limitations of postcolonial leadership. His socialist economic ideas faced strong resistance from foreign governments and local elites. Ethnic political divisions continued despite his nationalist vision. Economic challenges and institutional weakness limited the ability of the state to fully achieve social transformation.

Modern scholars therefore view Jagan as both a successful nationalist leader and a leader constrained by historical conditions. His experience shows that nation-building in postcolonial states is a long and contested process shaped by internal divisions, colonial legacies, and external pressures. It also shows that leadership alone cannot solve structural problems without strong institutions and inclusive governance.

Today, Jagan remains an important figure in discussions about democracy, nationalism, and development in the Global South. His political life provides valuable lessons about the possibilities and limits of postcolonial leadership in divided societies.

X. Findings

The study finds that Cheddi Jagan played a central role in shaping modern Guyana through his leadership in the anti-colonial movement, promotion of democratic values, and commitment to social and economic justice. His efforts to expand political participation, protect workers' rights, and advocate national self-determination made him one of the leading architects of Guyana's political development. The analysis also shows that his leadership extended beyond the struggle for independence by influencing democratic institutions and public debates on equality and governance. These contributions provide a strong historical basis for his recognition as one of the country's most significant national leaders.

The findings also reveal that Jagan's legacy remains complex and contested. His political image was shaped not only by his achievements but also by Cold War intervention, ideological conflicts, and the growth of ethnic politics after the split within the People's Progressive Party. While many Guyanese regard him as the "Father of the Nation," others question this title because of continuing political polarisation and competing historical narratives. The study therefore concludes that Jagan's national image represents both historical reality and symbolic political construction. His legacy continues to influence discussions on leadership, democracy, national identity, and postcolonial nation-building in Guyana.

XI. Discussion

The findings suggest that Cheddi Jagan's legacy should be understood within the broader context of postcolonial state-building rather than through a single political or ideological perspective. His leadership combined anti-colonial nationalism, democratic commitment, and social justice, making him a key figure in

Guyana's transition from colonial rule to self-government. The study supports the view that national leadership is shaped by both historical achievements and the political environment in which leaders operate. Cold War intervention, colonial legacies, and domestic ethnic divisions significantly influenced Jagan's political career and affected the pace of democratic and institutional development in Guyana. These factors demonstrate that leadership outcomes are often shaped by structural conditions beyond the control of individual leaders.

The study also shows that the title "Father of the Nation" is both a historical recognition and a political symbol. Jagan's image has been preserved through public memory, political narratives, and national institutions, but it has also been challenged by competing interpretations of Guyana's political history. This finding supports theories of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory, which argue that national identities are continuously shaped by historical interpretation and political discourse. Rather than presenting Jagan as either an unquestioned national hero or a divisive political figure, the study highlights the need for a balanced assessment that recognises both his achievements and his limitations. Such an approach contributes to a deeper understanding of political leadership, democratic legitimacy, and nation-building in postcolonial societies.

XII. Conclusion

This study examined the political legacy of Cheddi Jagan and critically assessed his recognition as the "Father of the Nation" of Guyana. The analysis shows that Jagan made significant contributions to the country's anti-colonial movement, democratic development, and nation-building. His leadership promoted political participation, social justice, workers' rights, and national sovereignty during a period of major political change. These contributions established him as one of the most influential figures in Guyana's modern history. At the same time, his political career was shaped by Cold War intervention, ideological rivalry, and growing ethnic polarisation, which continue to influence interpretations of his legacy.

The study finds that the title "Father of the Nation" reflects both historical achievement and symbolic political construction. While Jagan's role in shaping modern Guyana is widely acknowledged, public memory of his leadership differs across political and ethnic groups. His legacy therefore represents both national unity and historical contestation. By applying the concepts of nationalism, political myth, and collective memory, the study demonstrates that national leaders are remembered not only for their political achievements but also through evolving historical narratives and changing political contexts.

The study contributes to the existing literature by integrating historical evidence with contemporary theoretical perspectives to provide a balanced assessment of Cheddi Jagan's leadership. It moves beyond simple celebration or criticism by recognising both his achievements and the structural challenges that limited his political vision. The findings also contribute to wider debates on political leadership, democratic legitimacy, and nation-building in postcolonial societies, showing that the construction of national icons is a continuous political and social process rather than a fixed historical reality.

XIII. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on qualitative historical analysis using secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, archival records, and official documents. Although these sources provide a broad understanding of Cheddi Jagan's political legacy, the study does not include primary empirical data such as interviews, surveys, or field-based evidence from different communities in Guyana. Second, public perceptions of Jagan's legacy are examined through existing literature rather than direct

public opinion, which may not fully capture contemporary views across different generations and ethnic groups. Third, the study focuses primarily on the political and historical dimensions of Jagan's leadership and gives less attention to the economic and institutional outcomes of his policies. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and conclusions of the study.

XIV. Future Research

Future research can build on this study in several ways. Comparative studies may examine Cheddi Jagan alongside other postcolonial leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, and Lee Kuan Yew to better understand different models of nation-building and political leadership. Empirical research based on interviews, surveys, and public opinion data could also explore how different ethnic communities and younger generations perceive Jagan's legacy in contemporary Guyana. In addition, future studies may investigate the impact of Guyana's recent economic transformation, driven by major offshore oil discoveries, on changing interpretations of nationalism, political memory, and democratic leadership. Such research would deepen understanding of how historical legacies continue to shape political identity, governance, and nation-building in postcolonial societies.

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