Conclusion

The thesis begins with the premise: it is difficult to weed out native elements from the non-indigenous/alien ones. The Orientalist and the native scholarship are so tightly intertwined that the nationalists unconsciously built anticolonial discourse on the complex native/non-indigenous plane. Therefore, nationalism that works on ‘pristine’ and ‘uncorrupted’ traditions often refers to the Orientalist works and thoughts. With this hypothesis, I have examined the predicament involved in the construction of Indian traditions by both the Orientalists and the nationalists. The Orientalist study of Indian traditions made it easy for the colonisers to gain cultural access to the Indian mind. However, the traditions were interpreted within a European cultural context, that is, the colonisers interpreted Indian culture in relation to their cultural paradigms. Interestingly, the Orientalists textualised Indian culture that primarily followed oral tradition as in the smritis and the shrutis (Veer, Imperial Encounters 117-20). Thus, how far the canonical Indian scriptures were distorted during British colonialism in the supposed claims to the ‘original’ Indian traditions makes the entire gamut of textual Indian identity a problematic study. Similarly, to retrieve the lost cultural inheritance at the hands of the colonisers, the nationalists set down to re-interpret Indian traditions in their ‘pristine’ state. Since the exact ‘distortion’ or ‘authenticity’ is unknown, the nationalists were faced with the paradox of conceding to the Orientalist versions. However, resistance was articulated in projecting the colonisers as materialists in opposition to the ‘spiritually’ inclined Indians.

Indeed, the profound complexities involved in the whole phenomena of British colonialism cannot be simply reduced to the binary oppositions between the West versus the East. Nationalism was predominantly a hotchpotch of Brahmanism and Orientalism. These ‘isms’ sometimes worked together or appropriated each other in fashioning India. Therefore, nationalism is not a Western monolithic construct. There are various power-loaded ideologies involved in imagining India. In this sense, nationalism was not a replica of Orientalism and the colonised were autonomous in inventing their past. However, in resisting colonialism, Indian nationalists fashioned an ideological space of a spiritual and morally ‘superior’ nation that countered the Western image of uncivilised India (Mill ii: 107). As Partha Chatterjee remarks: “Pitting itself against the reality of
colonial rule, nationalism succeeds in producing a different discourse. The difference is marked on the terrain of political-ideological contest, a struggle for power, which nationalists must think about and set down in words" (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee 40).

In demarcating the differences between the West and the East, the nationalists valorised the co-ordinates already established by the Orientalists/Brahmans. Both Gandhi and Nehru are key figures in the struggle for freedom. Though they played a pivotal role in the imagination of India along with several other nationalists and reformers, their (Gandhi’s and Nehru’s) portraits still enjoy a privileged place in the official buildings. Thus, a focus on the nationalist constructions of Gandhi and Nehru helps to scrutinise the intertwined strands between Orientalism and nationalism, since these leaders enjoy a special place in the public memory both nationally and internationally. Hence, in order to postulate nationalism as “Orientalism-in-reverse”, I have examined the nationalist constructions in the works of the both Gandhi and Nehru (‘Azm 8). The works on Gandhi and Nehru are so prolific that a reasonable justice can be done in limiting their study to Indian nationalism before independence, and relating their political discourse to the colonial imaginations of India. Nationalism implies a resistant discourse, which paradoxically draws upon Western models of thought. The dissidence lies in appropriating colonial narratives to regain self-affirmation. My thesis should not be misread as reducing the entire spectrum of Indian nationalism to the political ideologies of Gandhi and Nehru. For I have scrutinised their political ideologies to understand the complicities and differences between Orientalism and nationalism.

The nationalists’ journey towards introspection was a reaction to colonial accusations. The colonisers were intrigued by India’s grandiose past and its subsequent decline. They fostered the idea of India as ‘unchanging’, religiously inclined and a spiritual nation (Marx and Engels 350). This is not to ignore the data circulated by the Brahmins, which accentuated the Orientalist discourse. However whether the Orientalist or the Brahmanical narratives provided a template for the nationalist imaginations, the idea of formulating and reformulating Indian traditions did not discontinue. The nationalists worked on colonial epistemologies to regain the lost ‘glorious’ past which was romanticized. Nationalism made Orientalist essences the benchmark in the restoration of traditions. The nationalists were well acquainted with Orientalist writings
which portrayed the efflorescence of the ‘grandiose’ Indian past. Orientalism intended to
serve the interests of British colonialism though it had a deep-seated effect on Indian
intellectuals and elites. These elites were made aware of the grand accomplishments of
their cultural past after the colonial contact. Following the Orientalist theory of
degeneration, the nationalists continued to endorse India’s decay. Gandhi, however,
blamed the Indians themselves since they had fallen an easy prey to Western
materialism. In providing a critique of Western materialism, Gandhi took Tolstoy,
Ruskin, Thoreau and Carpenter as exemplaries of anti-Western tradition (M. Gandhi,
Hind Swaraj 93). To advance his critique of Western modernity, Gandhi drew heavily
upon Western thinkers.

Interestingly, the nationalists came from urban classes and were exposed to
Western education. The education received was not without Western ideals of
democracy, liberty and equality, which somehow influenced the conceptualisation of
India in the works of Gandhi and Nehru. Rather their nationalist writings were the result
of pre-existing literature that had been predominantly Western. Gandhi was introduced to
the indigenous religious philosophy after he read the English translation of the Gita (M.
Gandhi, Autobiography 57). He was familiar with European historical works like
Edward Gibbons, History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, J. L. Motley’s
Rise of the Dutch Republic and Lord Rosebery’s Life of Pitt. (M. Gandhi, Collected
Works 29: 135). However, this knowledge of history identified Indian mythology in
contrast to European history. Thus, in spite of imitating colonial narratives of history
writing, Gandhi developed his mechanism of indigenous retelling of the past. In this
context Gandhi wrote:

I believe in the saying that a nation is happy that has no history. It
is my pet theory that our Hindu ancestors solved the question for
us by ignoring history as it is understood today and by building on
slight events their philosophical structure. Such is the
Mahabharata. And I look upon Gibbon and Motley as inferior
editions of the Mahabharata. (Cited in Iyer, Moral and Political
Writings 1: 187)
The creation of a national community on the basis of a common identity and goals has its roots in the concept of tradition. Since tradition is constantly reformulated and adjusted according to social change, identity is in a state of flux. However, both schools of thought, that is, Orientalism and nationalism have used the concept of tradition as a centripetal force directing textual knowledge of Indian culture towards—the ‘centre’—Eurocentrism or Indocentrism. Therefore, the study of the past becomes subjective, biased and hence distorted. Nehru, for instance, in the Discovery tries to restore India’s historical agency. He explores the entire panorama of India’s past, but often refers to European travellers and historians. However, the “subtle play of indigenous concepts” (Kaviraj, “Reversal of Orientalism” 267) that is, the use of idioms like “karma” and “yugadharma” counteracted European ‘discovery’ and produced the idea of a morally and spiritually ‘superior’ India (Nehru, Discovery 554, 557).

Unlike Gandhi, his protégé, Nehru, discovered in history a methodology which enabled him to articulate his cultural identity. History became the ground on which the nationalists challenged the European construction of India. However, Nehru endeavoured to narrate a different past that insisted upon the incipient stages of Indian nation, the rationality inherent in Indian philosophy and the scientific advancement as enshrined in the ancient scriptures (89). Though Nehru disputed colonial assumptions of Western supremacy, he nonetheless employed Western thoughts in the presentation of India vis-à-vis Britain.

British colonialism made “the west an overpowering presence in the consciousness of educated Indians” (Raychaudhari 5). In the cultural encounter between the coloniser and the colonised, there was an element of ambivalence. In fact, Indian intellectuals were made aware of their classical age accomplishments due to the Orientalist documentations. In harking back to the classical Indian traditions, the nationalists accepted the Orientalist ‘discoveries’. As demonstrated in the works of Gandhi and Nehru, the nationalist construction is recovery of the Indian past, which underlined tolerance and syncretism as defining features of Indian civilisation. The emphasis upon the unifying constituents of Indian traditions and religions was inspired by the belief in India as a nation. The colonial discourse castigated the recognition of India as a nation. Therefore, the endorsement of political disunity in India reinforced
British justification for ruling and providing a political stability. The ‘authoritative’ historical records perceived Indian polity as disorganised since it is the absence of “a combination of different states, and directing their powers to one common object [...] which rendered India so easy a conquest to all invaders” (Cited in Inden, Imagining India 170).

Critics like Ashis Nandy discuss the derivatiness of Indian nationalism inherent in the borrowing of Western modernity. He illustrates this in the religious philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The Swamis believed in the degradation of Indian civilisation due to the loss of the “original Aryan qualities” of masculinity (Intimate Enemy 24-5). However, Gandhi is considered outstanding in his resistance against British domination. Nandy asserts this in Gandhi’s negation of masculinity as superior to femininity (52-3). Therefore in dislocating social hierarchies, Nandy believes that Gandhi does not internalise Western values (24). Though Nandy successfully traces nationalism as a response and hence conditioned by colonial cultural values, he is unable to postulate Gandhi’s inheritance of certain European essences. Gandhi’s discourse gives primacy to femininity, but he too marshals gender to contest British knowledge. The Orientalist, William Jones, presented Indians as “effeminate”, “sunk deeply in the mythology of an ancient religion” and therefore a “submissive and indolent nation” (Cited in Niranjana 774). In a gendered discourse, the Orientalists demonstrated the West as rational—masculine—in contrast to the imagined feminine faculty of the East (Inden, Imagining India 94). Given the fact that the West gendered its Other as effeminate, Gandhi endowed women with the power to suffer and consequently associated the female ‘site’ with sublimity, virtuosity and traditionality. He feminised his politics in conflating the ideals of suffering with feminine qualities essential to the politics of non-violence. Regarding this Gandhi wrote: “woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?” (Cited in Iyer, Moral and Political Writings 3: 408). Thus Gandhi unsettled the colonial norms of masculinity through the constructed paradigm of femininity.

The construction of India should not be grossly misinterpreted as a servile copy of colonial ideologies, since the nationalists asserted India as an ‘uncorrupted’ cultural
space. It was emphasised that Indian traditions were firmly rooted in indigenous soil. But the nationalists had internalised Western thoughts, which often interrupted native discourse and proved to be a watershed in the imagination of India. To be completely annihilated, the colonial ideology as a legacy is too strongly embedded. In refuting colonial intrusion, nationalism continued to deploy the same stereotypes of imagining India within the dimensions of villages, religion, caste and gender. The nationalists desired a shift from Eurocentrism to Indocentrism. Nevertheless, these typecasts were twisted to impress upon the idea of India as morally ‘superior’, organised and preserver of the ideals of the past. The colonial hangover continued to inform the nationalist discourses, which failed to uproot the Orientalist moorings. Therefore, I have posited Gandhi as a “critical traditionalist” and Nehru as “critical modernist” who had not consciously adapted Orientalist narratives to satisfy their appetite for political-power (Parekh, Colonialism 35). Gandhi and Nehru’s discourse does straitjacket India in fixed essences, however had they been conscious of the limitations of their ideas of liberation they would have never allowed the nationalist opposition to take such a course. The nationalists were assigned a larger-than-life image and what went unexplored was the subtle ‘making’ and ‘discovery’ of India.

Despite its oppositional stance, nationalism runs the risk of accepting the Orientalist formulations of ‘glorified’ Indian traditions, fixed social category of caste, religion and the political unit of village society. Nevertheless, it is crucial to regard nationalism as a cultural force that politically vectored indigenous aspirations to combat the dehumanising facets of colonialism. The nationalists assaulted colonial denigration of Indian culture that once was perceived to be at par with European culture, but had degraded with the passage of time. The social reformers reinforced Orientalist knowledge in accepting the disjunction between the ‘glorious’ past and the contemporary decay. The power associated with political discourse and nationalist re-constructions was not Orientalist in a strict sense, that is, the nationalists did not manoeuvre popular support for any political concessions or for oppression.

In compiling the diverse Hindu codes into a legal record, the Orientalists endeavoured to bring variant religious groups under a single system of governance (Rocher 221-2). Ironically, Orientalism that played a significant role in reducing India to
the fixed coordinates of religion, caste and gender, furthered the nationalist movement. Nationalism was haunted by the thought of unifying pluralities within Indian society. The heterogeneous religious identity was trimmed into a homogenous Hindu Identity. Religious affiliations were cited to prove the other sects as the offshoots of Hinduism. Though this power of reinventing an all-inclusive Hindu/Indian identity mobilised the masses for a common cause of ousting colonial rule, it coincided with the Orientalist essences of a single Hindu identity. This meant the construction of an overarching Indian identity. In fact, the very notion of ‘Indianness’ crystallised during the nationalist struggle.

Orientalism is an inescapable framework for the understanding of India and its subsequent construction. Orientalism survives in Indian nationalism that “appropriated orientalism in the name of national self-representation” (Ludden 271). What this implies is that as a body of textual knowledge, Orientalism determines not only the Other to legitimate colonial rule, but also is crucial in deciding the content of the national identity of the Other. Gandhi and Nehru have cited Max Müller, Schopenhauer, Romain Rolland and various European writers who worked on Indian social and religious themes. Since it is not possible for any nationalism to give credit to the very discourse it opposes, the nationalists used native idioms and emphasised the ‘purity’ and ‘originality’ of nationalist narratives. Orientalism fed the colonial discourse and disseminated colonialism as a ‘superior’ culture in contrast to Indian culture. Therefore, Orientalism and colonialism are used interchangeably, though both were different in their modes of bolstering European power.

The process of decolonisation created the Self and Other polarity and thrived on the textualized tradition, which was not the creation of colonialism but had been subtly introduced by the colonisers who had to culturally defend their rule in India. In their engagement with India’s past the sympathetic Orientalists, William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Max Muller, besides others admitted the ancient splendour in arts, government and legislation was a thing of the past for the present “degenerate and abased” Indians (Cited in Kopf 39). Though a return to a ‘pristine’ Indian heritage, which the nationalists allegedly stated, was not possible; a national consciousness was invented which could not disentangle Western imagination without revisiting colonial ideologies and the
associated values. In reviewing colonial culture, the nationalists were compelled to critically examine their nativity and in this process constructed “the other of colonialism” as “the self of decolonization” (Pieterse and Parekh 6).

Nationalism countered European theories of an essentialised India, yet its survival was based on the dichotomy between the Indian Self and the European Other. Paradoxically, the nationalists developed “a deep self-reflexity about their tradition” after a comparative study between European and Indian cultures (Amiya Sen 3). An ‘indigenous’ twist was however given to the concept of an imagined national community. The Orientalists and the nationalists carved India in imaginative idioms. Nationalism succeeded as a mass uprising against the colonisers as it had an ‘indigenous’ edge over Orientalism. The Indo-Aryan myth of a common Indo-European lineage was foundational in demonstrating cultural links between Britain and India that was “lost in antiquity” (Bhatt 14). Such a cultural link authorised the Orientalists to rediscover Indian culture. The nationalists too forged an ‘indigenous’ identity in accepting the Indo-Aryan myth. But the motive was to propagate racial equality between the ‘superior’ Europeans and the ‘inferior’ Indians. As Gandhi remarked: “Max Muller [. . .] and a host of other writers with one voice [. . .] show very clearly that both the races have sprung from the same Indo-European Aryan stock” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 1: 102-3).

Nation assumed the function of a mother. Such an imagery evoked by nationalism created a familial bond between the nation and the people. National autonomy was present in the home—a spiritual terrain of Indian culture—where woman was perceived as the mark of tradition. On the contrary, the “outer” sphere that Europe stood for represented male/material domain (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee 121). Therefore, in creating a wedge between the “inner” spirituality and “outer” materialism, the nationalists defended their culture from the European gaze but succumbed to the Orientalist paradigm of a spiritual nation. The Orientalists identified women as an index to primitive customs (Teltscher 52). In postulating the sufferings of Indian women, the colonisers attempted to equate women and tradition. Since woman was considered to be the epitome of Indian traditions, the colonisers believed that reforming the conditions of women would consequently improve Indian traditions and portray a benevolent face of the European master (Mani 90).
The authority of the scriptures determined the position of women in Indian society. Gandhi, Nehru, the spiritual gurus Vivekananda and Aurobindo, too favoured Hindu scriptures as the quintessence of Indian culture. The noted Sanskrit scholar and Orientalist, Max Muller, upheld the Vedas as the repository of Indian “religious and moral ideas” and its impact was such that it was “impossible to find the right point of view for judging of Indian religions; morals and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age” (Cited in Chakravarti 40). The word swaraj, which Gandhi used instead of independence, was vedic in origin. Though Gandhi was a “critical traditionalist” (Parekh, Colonialism 35), he did not approve of every word of the scriptures, his political idioms were frequently loaded with religious metaphors mainly from the Gita. In this regard, Gandhi remarked: “the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference” (M. Gandhi, Autobiography 221). Nehru too attributed the endurance of Indian culture to the metaphysical and scientific philosophies enshrined in the Upanishads. The Orientalists educated the native intellectuals. However the nationalists were different from the Orientalists in “inverting the Orientalist arrangement and declaring the superiority of the Indian” (Hubel, “In Search of the British” 232).

Resistance as a reverse discourse has many fissures. Instead of dismantling the eurocentric agenda in the process of colonisation, nationalism as a mode of resistance resets the categories of power-relations. In an attempt to retrieve indigenous culture, the past is valorised and constructed to destabilise colonialism. Derivativeness in Partha Chatterjee’s sense explains nationalism as a discourse that denies cultural inferiority with a contradictory acceptance of the “intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based” (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee 30). Sudipta Kaviraj presents the nationalist version of Orientalism as an “idea that Indian society was irreducibly different from the modern West” (Cited in Heehs, “Shades of Orientalism” 180). However, it differs from colonial discourse in its contestation for alternative power.

Nationalism enabled mass mobilisation. The elite nationalists activated popular consciousness through religious sentiments. Gradually religious overtones gave way to nationalism as religion. The whole concept of the adulation of women as Goddesses/mother was extended to the personification of the nation as a female deity.
Thereby women/gender as a cultural ‘site’ imbricate with religious nationalism so
fundamental to mass mobilisation. In Nehru’s vocabulary, India was Bharat Mata
(Nehru, Autobiography 429), and he was anxious to give her “the garb of modernity”
(Nehru, Discovery 50). Gandhi expresses his reverence for Mother India in his
appreciation for Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s poetic allegory as follows:

(Bankim) describes Mother India as sweet-smelling, sweet-speaking, fragrant, all-powerful, all-good, truthful, a land flowing
with milk and honey, and having ripe fields, fruits and grains, and
inhabited by a race of men whom we have only a picture in the
great Golden Age. He pictures to us a land which shall embrace in
its possession the whole of the world, the whole of humanity by
might or right, not of physical power but of soul-power. (M.
Gandhi, Collected Works 13: 64)

On the contrary, the colonisers emphasised Indian religiosity as irrational that set the
Indians apart from the ‘superior’ Europe. Marx, in his thesis on India equates the
worship of “Kummun (sic), the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow” to brutalism and
degradation (Marx and Engels 351). Nationalism uses religion to stimulate the people to
either kill or die for an abstract entity—the nation. Ironically, it is the religious and
cultural ideologies that activate communal forces which strive for separatism. Thus, the
cohesive nature of nationalism melts down to the demand for separate states. The root
cause of the failure of contemporary nationalism is the myopic vision of the nationalists
during the colonial regime. The independence movement motivated the people in the
name of religion and culture. It proved to be strategic in overthrowing British rule.
However, the ubiquitous manipulation of religion and the past narratives anticipated the
current trend of cultural nationalism since the nationalists were unable to transcend the
European trope of an essentialised India. The immutable stereotype of caste, village and
religion have been employed freely both by the Orientalists and the nationalists. Both the
‘isms’ were proposed as “redemptive project in which the Orient is restored to its past
glory and the Orientalist is spiritually regenerated” (Hart 65). Nationalism celebrated this
“redemption” in the name of subjectivity and cultural pride. Whereas Orientalism
masked economic exploitation in the redemption of the colonial subjects who were deficient in “mental and moral cultivation” (Viswanathan 5).

In order to refute colonial allegations, the nationalists disputed colonial narratives of the Indian past. Prompted by the Orientalist research on India, the nationalists reversed the colonial official discourse (Khilnani, Idea of India 158). Gandhi defied Western values that had ‘corrupted’ Indian civilisation. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi’s nationalist project aimed to replace Western modernity with Indian spirituality. Gandhi’s preference for an indigenous institution of education, economics and political organisation was a response to colonialism. Similarly, Nehru’s dream of a modern India that was simultaneously anchored to the past ideals reveals the predicament of the nationalists who made efforts to ‘discover’ their Indianness “via the West” (Nehru, Discovery 50). In an attempt to ‘rescue’ Indian traditions from the grip of colonial culture, nationalism is guilty of its vulnerability to Orientalism.

Considering nationalism as a reverse discourse apparently seems to suggest that all discursive powers are inherent within Western thought and resistance was a Western construct. However this is not the case. As demonstrated in the Introduction, the subaltern historian, Hardiman, elucidates the precolonial non-violent forms of protestations which compelled the wrongdoer to submit to the demands. These resistant strategies were present before colonialism, but transformed into a national movement during the encounter with the West (Hardiman 44). Thus, nationalism as a ‘site’ of resistance was not a Western invention, but the consequence of Western scholarship which was a joint involvement of the Orientalists and the ‘indigenous’ Sanskrit scholars.