Chapter 1

Orientalism: Cultural and Authoritarian Discourse

In this chapter, I intend to explore Orientalism as a discourse embedded in the texts which were suitably interpreted and translated to impose a fixed cultural meaning. In fact, it was this textual essence that was useful to “nationalize the past” (Veer, Imperial Encounters 122). I have subdivided this chapter into two. Though the sections appear separate, they frequently overlap to illustrate the interchangeability of the terms culture, tradition and religion. The first section examines the Orientalist strategies and cultural readings that go into the ‘discovery’ and ‘making’ of India as a nation. The second part traces the role of Indian spiritualists in deciphering the script of the Indian past. Finally, both the sections are placed side by side to assert the ‘authentic’ representation of India, either by the nationalists or the Orientalists, via the excavation of India’s antiquity for different reasons, however. In evaluating the invocation of the Indian past, I aim to focus on the appropriation of a Hindu nationalist identity into a pan-Indian identity. Interestingly, such a “single, privileged system of re-presentation” operates on the concept of homogenous cultural identity (Anderson 14). Thus, as an ideological construct, nationalism is premised on a common culture, which largely alludes to the symbols of Hinduism. In section two of this chapter, I have enumerated the religious philosophies of some of the Indian gurus whose teachings were subsequently borrowed for political expediency.

As a cultural apparatus, Orientalism is “will to truth, and knowledge” (Said, Orientalism 204). It is an intervention in the cultural arena to speak for the East, a basis to acknowledge the presence of the Orient through the articulation of the West, which was trained to access and decode the agendas and mysteries of the Other. The Oriental texts are “worked-upon monuments, arranging and rearranging the cultural’s sense of its identity” (Schwab xix). The colonial authority formulates a fixed category of peripherality for the colonised and hence designates the Orient as incapable of self-governance (Mill viii: 368). Since the concept of Otherness and difference is culturally conditioned, the Orient becomes an epistemological province placed into the niches provided by cultural readings.
The Orient is the archetype of Europe’s imagination. That imagination is not politically innocent, that is, it is governed by institutionalisation and codification of the Oriental stereotype. According to Said, Orientalism is not a “European fantasy about the Orient” (Orientalism 6), but is a discourse whose veracity is reinforced through the encoded system of language—the text. The text assigns ‘presence’ to the narrative and displaces the ‘reality’ of the discursive formulations towards the ‘centre’. The reference to the earlier Western knowledge about India “assumes [. . .] previous knowledge of the Orient” (20). The extractions of Oriental anthologies invested it as a system of knowledge and unchallengeable authority. Said enumerates on Orientalism as a dissemination of scholarly texts that validates the difference between the representatives and the represented. Orientalism is not a static interpretation of the Orient as an object. Instead it is a dynamic diffusion between the culture systems and the political ideologies. Similarly both Gandhi and Nehru ‘discovered’ India through the study of Western texts and Indian philosophy. Thus the study of the Indian past remains a textual subject which is interpreted by the nationalists and the Orientalists.

Though Said’s Orientalism paved the way for the study of cultural identity inherent in power discourses, yet critics like Bernard Lewis and Aijaz Ahmed have hit his theory hard (Ahmed, In Theory 172-3). According to these critics, Said’s voice for a Third-world space creates an aporia from which there is no escape. Aijaz Ahmed accuses Said of Orientalist continuities. Said’s use of words like ‘we’ and ‘us’ refer to Palestinians and Third-world intellectuals. Thereby Said widens the schism between the Other and the Self. This bespeaks of his Orientalist borrowings. Said remains silent about the ways Western epistemologies are challenged by the colonized. By rejecting the Orientalists methodologies, the ‘margin’s’ claim for autonomy partakes most of the features of Orientalism. Rejections are intertwined with complicity. In other words, the ‘centre’ and the ‘margin’ are steeped in the “metaphysics of presence” (Derrida 90-1). In emphasising the limitations of Said’s postcolonial theory, I underscore the nationalist predicament that negotiates tradition in the ‘making’ and ‘unmaking’ of India as a nation. In fact, tradition is the basis for apprehending Indian history/myth for the purposes of comparative philology. With the ascendancy of the national movement, the antagonism of the Self and the Other propounded by the Europeans changed roles. The nationalists defied Western assumptions about India and constructed the Indian past
following their own understanding of Indian culture. However, this construction did not de-essentialise India’s imagined past. The bulk of European writings are research works on the classical Indian traditions that either glorified or conceives it as “stagnant” (Marx and Engels 350). Nationalism partook in the European and Orientalist processes of the Indian past that the European imagination had inscribed.

What surfaces from the plethora of translations is the realisation of language as the key to sovereignty. Hence, the linguistic subjugation follows the political one. The purpose of translations is to unfold the maze of local customs and culture. Such Orientalist activities produce the very Orient it constructs and imagines in its discourse (Said, Orientalism 40). In this context, James Mill’s account of Hindu religion is noteworthy. He writes in his History of India: “This religion has produced a practice which has strongly engaged the curiosity of Europeans; a superstitious care of the life of the inferior animals” (Cited in Inden, “Orientalist Constructions” 409).

Another Indologist who contributes to the Orientalist archive and translations is William Jones. William Jones’s translated work on Shakuntala has five editions. This gains him an international reputation. His Shakuntala is the first link with an ‘authentic’ India. On the basis of the data of classical antiquity and the accounts of various voyagers, the Orientalists try to remake the civilization of the Orient. The work of assembling and interpreting local laws and customs stabilizes British authority and facilitates further penetration. To reinforce the perception of Orientalism as an “archive”, it is necessary to bind the archive “to the unifying values or stereotypes engendered by cultural readings” (Said, Orientalism 41). Cultural studies help the outsider to “penetrate by an act of historical sympathy” (118). Orientalism is an institution, or in Said’s terminology, a body of knowledge not free of socio-cultural, historical and political formations. It is not simply a scholarly exercise but a partisan ideology as well. An analysis of Orientalism is essential since the production of a textual subject could be possible once the cultural mysteries of the Other could be rendered. Orientalism was effective in doing so. Both the Orientalist and the nationalists (Gandhi and Nehru) had interpreted the textual subject bound in the archives. In fact, the nationalists used culture as a symbol of difference from the West to dislocate the “colonial cultural project of control” (Dirks, “Introduction” 15). Therefore, culture remained a ‘site’ of struggle.
In Orientalism, Said claims that the strength of European culture lies in its setting itself off against the Other. In other words, the East functions as negative foil for the West. Locke's theory of man, for instance, postulates Indians as "objects of concern" rather than as "self-defining subjects entitled to choose their way of life themselves." According to J. S. Mill, most European societies had reached the "maturity of their faculties." By contrast, non-European societies were all backward and in a "state of infancy" (Cited in Parekh, "The West and its others" 184). For Marx, the Indian "idyllic village communities" had always been "the foundation of Oriental despotism"; they restrained the human mind and made it the "unresisting tool of superstition" (Marx and Engels 350).

Likewise, India had been configured around certain institutions like the caste, the villages and religion. Different perceptions have cast India in their own terrain of knowledge. The colonial sociology situated India in the essentialist tropes and the village, as a unit of community, was functional in classifying the masses. The Orientalists assumed that the 'irrational' Indian mind relied on social groups – caste, village, and religion. The villages were the "solid foundation of Oriental despotism". The idyllic village communities evoked "undignified, stagnant, and vegetative life." By reducing the Indian villages to static social communities, the Orientalists justified colonialism as the "unconscious tool of history" in bringing about a "fundamental revolution" (351). The ancient India was riveted in an ideal image of village-republics, caste-system, and religious philosophies. The focus on caste, for instance, served to affix it as one of the essences of India. The Orientalists conceived caste – India's essential social institution – as the cause of its repeated conquests (Dirks, Castes of Mind 5). Marx interrogated the cause of India's intrusion and concluded the rigidity of caste as its prime cause (Marx and Engels 350-1).

The past culture as a resource of the 'origins' of India was one of the commonest of strategies in the interpretations of the present cultural reading of imperialism. It highlighted that colonialism/Orientalism was not a simple act of aggrandizement. Both were the consequence of the ideological constructions of the gap between the coloniser and the colonised and of the notion that the Other beseeches transformation. In the Indian context, the study of the past elevated the Indo-Aryan vitality and vigour. The Europeans
were painted with benevolent faces that could “rescue” their Aryan brethren from the present deprivation (Singh 4). The sometimes “barbaric” (Mill ix: 185) and sometimes “stagnatory” (Marx and Engels 350) played hide and seek in the Oriental lexicon, thereby reinforcing cultural hegemony. The Oriental dictum was that the West dominates and the East must be dominated. Orientalism as phenomenon was a scientific classification of the Orient to position the West as enlightened and rational. The Indian social customs were incoherent to the Europeans. They defined these customs in relation to their social practices (Singh 28). The imposition of the Oriental culture on the Western domain produced and perverted the Orient’s image whose absurd mind seemed to be incongruous in comparison to the European rational mentality. The European norm spelt out the Oriental as “irrational”, “liar”, “lethargic” and an antithesis of the European (Cited in Said, Orientalism 38-40).

The piecemeal transition from the merchant class to the ‘representatives’ of a subjected nation was flooded with writings and translations. The textual position thus established, contributed to the essentialisation of India. The imperialists, who entered as tradesmen, symbolized India as a land of riches. Gradually, with the setting up of the empire, their interests skewed towards the study of Indian civilization and culture. Nevertheless, whether India was translated as a land of plenty or a land of wisdom, the writings tenaciously cast India as Europe’s negative foil. The travel accounts on India were a tissue of quotations from other voyagers’ experiences. The bulk of travel literature drew upon the metaphor of India as a land of trade and sensuality, although few of them departed from this romantic imagination and magnified a grim picture of India. The entire travel literature reproduced materials of earlier voyagers and developed as a “system for citing works and authors” (23).

For instance, William Hawkins naturalised his inscriptions by referring to a series of travellers. He cited works of Hakluyt and Purchas to remind his readers that “they have read in other Authors” (Teltscher 16). Their accounts functioned as a feedback to the commercial expansion, but the economic survey did carry a cultural baggage. Another exemplary case is that of Sir Thomas Roe, King James’s I ambassador to the Mughal court, who dismissed Hindu festivals and idolatries as “stupid” since they were grounded upon “tradition, not Reason” (17). He radically differed on the Indian relation
of language to cultural symbols. The Europeans understood language as semiotics. On the other hand, the Mughal custom of the veneration of the King’s message by laying the message on the head was interpreted as “barbaric” for the Europeans. Roe’s description of the Mughal court’s excesses had been shaped by the “conventional tropes of wonder and discovery” (Singh 38). The theme of wonder and awe were to become the basis of colonial rules/writings. Roe’s journal was a manual that familiarized the imperial power with the native culture. His travel journal formed a cornerstone for the Oriental records on the Indian form of governance. Roe deployed his own system of meanings to Indian cultural symbols. The overlapping of the cultural meanings engineered an Europeanised Indian culture. Indeed his exposure to Marlowe’s plays overwhelmed him to compare the Mughal court dealings with European theatrical acts. Jahangir’s “weighing ceremony”, when he used to sit on a weighing scale and measured against precious stones, was dismissed as “stage props in the spectacle” (Teltscher 20).

In the absence of written laws and lack of knowledge of local dialects, the English found it hard to correlate their social relations with their subjects. The desire to translate innumerable Indian sacred texts and transfix their interpretation provided the unilateral way the Orient had to pass through to ‘learn’ about itself. The travellers’ encounters and experiences were recorded and formed an “archive of information” (Said, Orientalism 41) that subsequently supplemented the textual representation inherent in Orientalism. Gradually these archives, which had become sediment in the works of Orientalists, were relied upon whenever they faced the awesome Orient. The task of the Orientalist was to prove the ‘truths’ of the textual Orient he had studied from an existing Oriental scholarship. A redemptive project served as the “unconscious tool of history” (Marx and Engel 351).

Colonialism did not invent the Indian traditions and knowledge, but it characterised India as fundamentally religious, caste oriented and as a village society. In fact, these were the main co-ordinates which figured in the Orientalist texts and later shaped the counter discourse of nationalism. British colonialism was successful in acquiring empirical knowledge about Indian sociology. Orientalism had formed an authoritative body of knowledge which significantly contributed to colonial expansion. The Orientalist scholarship, which supported the study of Indian classical literature
gradually gave way to Anglicism. Such modulated Orientalism however, was cautious not to puncture India's domain of spirituality. Regarding this the British historian, James Mill comments:

The country has suffered, and must even suffer, many and great disadvantages from the substitution of strangers for its own functionaries, its own chiefs [. . .] it has been, in some degree, compensated for their loss, by exemption from the fatal consequences of native mis-rule—by protection against external enemies [. . .] and the progressive introduction of the arts and sciences, the intelligence and civilisation of Europe. (Mill ix: 396)

Nevertheless, both the projects of Indology continued to influence colonial documentation on India. Warren Hastings, for instance encouraged the study of Indian classical languages which helped to understand indigenous laws. He believed a textual knowledge of the Indian traditions provided the British administrators a base on which they could “graft Western notions and methods on to the main stem of Eastern institutions stem” (Cited in Cohn, Colonialism 61). The colonial discourse translated the Orient through textual codes and subsequently invested the Other with a knowledge that could determine the “positional superiority” of Orientalism (Said, Orientalism 7). This implied the colonial cultural strength that located the Orient vis-à-vis the Western consciousness. For instance, the essentialisation of India as a village republic and religion as the mainstay of Indian culture were generated by colonial official discourse.

The colonial administrator, Thomas Munro did not favour the appointment of middlemen for revenue collection in the villages. He complied a data of the Indian village administration which established the villages as the basic political structure (Ludden 259-62). This fixed construction of village republics was useful for the succeeding administrators and added to the Orientalist empiricism. In the entire process of accumulating an Orientalist archive, the Other was transposed to a past. Europeans couched their political motives in their civilising mission and legitimised such ‘discoveries’ (Cohn, Colonialism 46). In this context Warren Hastings’s remarks demonstrate the colonial pursuit of knowledge as necessary for British rule:
Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state [... ] it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence [... ] . Every instance that brings their real character (i.e., that of the Indians) and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own. (Cited in Cohn, Colonialism 45)

Warren Hastings was the first to commission treatises on Hindu laws entitled A Code of Gentoo (sic) Laws. It was succeeded by A Digest of Hindu law on Contracts and Successions, translated by H. T. Colebrooke. These digests brought together a wide panorama of laws and grouped them into a unified ‘Judicial Plan’. For the British judges, the written rules were a privileged source with which they could turn down the opinions of the native pundits. Subsequently, the written rules were naturalized. The classical texts were succeeded by colonial data. The British administers, Read and Munro, drafted the Fifth Report entirely for administrative purposes and sought to prove the Indian villages as the basic unit of administration. Their agenda was to weed out the middlemen between the taxpayers and the Company and collect revenue directly. The Fifth Report was data that did not rely on the indigenous records (Ludden 260). It rather construed the Indian village republics not from the past data, but from colonial documented reports. The British civil servants unlocked the ‘obscure’ Indian language and like the travellers drew on literary genres and prescriptive texts. For the civil servants it was mandatory to be detained at the college of Fort William and get suitable training in the Oriental languages.

In its experiment of reconfiguring the Orient, the political governance of Western civilization was presented as organised side-by-side with the ‘unorganised’ native. Irrespective of their varied responses towards India, both the early and late nineteenth century Orientalisms were almost tautological. William Jones’s digest on Hindu laws tried “to codify [...] the infinite variety [...] to a complete digest of laws” (Orientalism 78). The diverse Hindu dharma was streamlined into a textualised legal document. The
Orientalist fables and myths culled from texts created the Orient as a figment of the West. In this context, Said in his *Orientalism* cites Napoleon's military expeditions that impinge on textual imperialism. Napoleon used native literary studies to manage and maintain a rapport with the locals. In his conquest of Egypt, the reverence towards the Koran assisted him to gain popular trust. Thus by utilizing the knowledge of the books on the Orient, Napoleon emerged victorious before the actual annexation (Said, *Orientalism* 80).

The Anglicists who opposed the Oriental processes too participated in the orientalising project of prescribing their system of knowledge in the production of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 729). The nationalists, groomed in the Western system of education, like Gandhi and Nehru, used Western scholarship to subvert and challenge the colonial authority. In this sense, the Indian elites used Western knowledge to 'discover' and resurrect India, but appropriated Western epistemology to foster self-pride in Indian cultural identity. This was in a manner corresponding to the European mindset, which constructed "the realities of other cultures, people and their languages, in favour of Occidental self-affirmation, domination and ascendancy" ('Azm 6).

In considering nationalism as an alternative to Western narrative, I problematise the ambiguity inherent in nationalism as "reverse-discourses [. . .] interlocked with and parasitic on the dominant they contest" (Parry 177). Moreover, to register a new kind of cultural identity that claimed to challenge the British dominion, tradition was reconfigured as a 'site' for social reformation, a metaphor that "signified the feminised interior of a social order structured around gendered separate spheres" (Hancock 902-3). The 'immutable' Indian past was conceived as "interior" sphere and signified spiritualism as the core of the Indian traditions. Furthermore, the 'pristine' tradition suggested the 'authenticity' over the imported colonial knowledge. However, the methodology of identifying the nation in terms of collective pasts echoed Orientalist assumptions. The nationalists constructed a hiatus between the "interior" spiritualism that the East represented and the "exterior" materialism that the West stood for. Thereby it rendered 'essential' India in spiritual metaphor and identified the "inner" domain in terms of domestic sphere. To retain the pride in Indian culture, the nationalists asserted
spiritualism as an antidote to Western “outer” materialism. This dichotomy of the East and the West continued to articulate a distinctive identity structured on the colonial differences (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee120). The “inner” and the “outer” spirit embody the contradictions within the nationalist discourse. Partha Chatterjee describes the nationalist project that situated the “outer” domain in Western civilisation and its influential impact on the natives in contrast to the “inner” indigenous self. However, to preserve the self-identity the nationalist discourse envisages an “inner” domain which corresponds with a ‘pristine’ ‘uncorrupted’ national identity. The “inner” spiritual terrain remains unconquered. The nationalists believed in assimilating the East and the West culture which is limited to the “outer”/world space. But the “home”/ “inner” terrain does not permit any colonial intrusion. Thus the politics of “exclusion”/ “inclusion” (Zutshi 84) is ideological in its marking of the boundaries between the “inner”/ “outer” dichotomy. This implies the construction of ‘Indianness’ in the acceptance and refusal of Orientalist/colonialist assumptions about Indian culture.

Interestingly, gendering the nation, conceived as a new avatar of Orientalism, integrated women and tradition as an indigenous space of purity and spiritualism. Gandhi’s political discourse is a case in point. Gandhi’s Home Rule/ swaraj was influenced by the Irish anticolonial struggle. Nevertheless, he modified this European movement in the usage of cultural symbols and indigenous idioms (Young, Postcolonialism 318). He made comparisons between the swadeshi movement and Sinn Fein—independence movement in Ireland— and asserted that Sinn Fein in Gujarati meant swadeshi movement (Parel, M.K. Gandhi 21). Gandhi countered European ideology by feminising politics. The British celebrated masculinity and aligned their courageous rule over the colonial subjects with masculine power. In his essay on Warren Hastings, Macaulay illustrated colonial masculinity as the reason for European superiority. Hastings viewed Indians as effeminate. On the feeble demeanour of the Bengalis he added, “courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable” (Cited in Veer, Imperial Encounters 95). In stark contrast to the European stereotype of masculine power, Gandhi based his resistance on the power of feminine virtues, that is, purity, tolerance self-control and spiritual strength. In Gandhi’s discourse women were considered as a paragon of a ‘pristine’ Indian tradition. Gandhi advised the Indian women—“the
enlightened daughters of Bharat Mata”—to be strong, pure and “conserve what is best in
our culture [. . .] . This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis” (M.
Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma* 383). Thus Gandhi’s nationalist narrative not only appropriated
the European paradigm of a gendered nation, but also ritualised the image of “woman-as-
nation” (Zutshi 128).

The nationalists and the Orientalists had different stories to narrate. The theory of
the Indian past did not have a single voice. However, the ‘discovery’ of ‘new’ meanings
continued to enrich and contribute to the growth of Indology. The earlier Orientalists,
like William Jones, circulated the idea of a classical Indian past. The Anglicists, who
vehemently opposed the Orientalists, disrupted the Orientalist survey of the Indian past.
James Mill condemned the Indian society as primitive and backward (Mill viii: 368).
Though located on different loci of the same scale, the Anglicists and the Orientalists
textualised the Indian past. The colonial legacy of inscribing the Indian past continued to
inform the elite-led nationalism.

Obviously, the British conquest was not only a military expedition, but also an
ideological victory, which succeeded in imposing a dominant culture. In doing so, it
effected the colonised who either found it irresistible to oust the Western concept of
modernity or resisted the permeation of European knowledge into the native identity
formation. Both ways set the ground and became a decisive component in defining
‘Indianness’. Certainly, the nationalists refuted the charges of a degraded Indian
civilisation and the colonial practices of reducing India to Orientalists/Anglicists
readings. Paradoxically, the colonial discourse set the terms of negotiating Indian
traditions. The nationalists were “acquainted with Indian philosophy in its anglicised,
translated form” (Young, *Postcolonialism* 319). Gandhi illustrates this paradox as he
recollects:

Towards the end of my second year in England I came across two
Theosophists [. . .] . They were reading sir Edwin Arnold’s
translation—the Song Celestial—and they invited me to read the
original with them. I felt ashamed as I had read the divine neither
Gandhi’s experiments in dietetics were initiated in England where he subscribed to a weekly journal, *The Vegetarian* (50). The European authors who wrote on vegetarianism and its ethical effects on the consumers appealed to Gandhi’s observance of *brahmacharya* (Alter 9). Nehru too read a corpus of Orientalist literature on India that seemed to be “awaiting ecstatic comprehension” in the nationalist ‘discoveries’ (R. Radhakrishnan 90). The colonial experience set the grounds for the ‘discovery’ of India, introspection, the reformations of traditions and the dialectics between tradition and modernity. While interrogating ‘Indianness’ as an interplay of Orientalism and nationalism, I consider it imperative to examine the construction of the past. This interrogation forms the focus of the next section.

In this second section, I argue that the Brahmanical tendency within the Indian traditions and Orientalism together contributed in constructing a homogenous concept of ‘Indianness’. I start with the Orientalist project of appropriation followed by the indigenous narratives of counter-appropriation. The different views, nevertheless, did share a belief in representing an Indian culture which had been “organically disrupted by historical circumstance but was capable of revitalization” (Kopf 8). The engineering of identity by either school, that is, the Orientalist and the nationalist, stimulated by the revival of the past was informed by a notion of the Other, that is, to bring a deliberate contrast between the ‘glorious’ past and the ‘decayed’ present and hence the idea of regeneration and revitalization. The Other could be reached through cultural insights. These schools of thought chose ancient India as a launch pad for their ‘knowing’ India contest. The contest between the nationalist elites and the European bourgeois, both of which constituted the intelligentsia, was to set authoritative accounts that affirmed India’s past. The West embodied the material power while the East made spiritual knowledge its forte.

The Orientalists related themselves as representatives of Indian culture which was organically annihilated but was capable of renewal. Europe’s craving for the restoration of a ‘golden age’ was required to engineer the concept of an advanced India. British supremacy could be subsequently asserted when the advanced ‘golden’ age was contrasted with the present lapse of glory, which the British could only revive. Hence, the obsession with the ‘grandiosity’ of the past aided in determining their identity vis-à-
vis India and consequently affirmed their moral superiority. The colonizers had to alter India’s ‘murky’ past into a logical European present. The chief purpose of resuscitation of the Indian past was to understand Indian culture as a basis for legitimising colonial administration. For the company representatives, Hindu and Muslim laws were translated into English and further the company regulations were rendered into the native dialects. Warren Hastings, for instance, “encouraged [. . .] learned pundit (sic) to settle in Calcutta, and support them while they translated out of the Sanskrit into more acceptable dialects” (Cited in Kopf 21).

The account of the rise-and-fall Indian civilisation revealed two facets of India. Thoroughly engaged in dusting off the decayed phase of colonial India, the colonisers perpetuated a ‘lost’ grandiose past that could be renewed by the descendants of the Indo-Aryan stock. It was posited that the Aryans were culturally superior and in establishing the Indo-Aryan linkages, the Europeans buttressed their hegemony. A research into the archive of the unchartered period of Indian history, that is, the ancient age, promoted understanding between the ruler and the ruled. One of the means was of tracing the genealogy of Sanskrit language to the European language. Sanskrit had been the ancient language of the Aryans who were considered to be the descendants of a common Indo-European stock. Max Müller attempted in his writings to convince the Indian subjects and the European audience about the idea of myths and theories of Aryan ‘origin’. He described the Aryans as the “true ancestors of our European age” (Cited in Chakravati 40). The past was recalled to create a contrast between the pre-colonial Indian history and the contemporary period.

William Jones and H. T. Colebrooke were among the Orientalists who had mapped the Vedic age as the golden age of India. The Vedas exhibited the Aryan intellect and the sublime theories associated with them. They were the repositories of Indian wisdom and the philosophical/ metaphysical doctrine was inherent in them. The concepts of Brahman, Karma, duality and non-duality contained in the Vedas addressed the eternal and spiritual foundations of Hinduism. The Orientalist researchers identified Hinduism with the ancient Indian civilization. William Jones’s principal discovery was the linguistic link between Indo-Europeans that would culturally unite the Indians (Aryans) with the Europeans. The rediscovery of the common source of Indo-European
language added a new dimension to the understanding of Indian civilization (Chakravarti 30).

Jones’s accomplishment was not limited to comparative linguistics. Indeed, he extended his philology to Indian philosophy as well. He conceded to the principle of Aryan genius. Vedas, the philosophical treatise of the Aryans, Jones emphasised, could not be understood “without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India” (Cited in Kopf 38). Interestingly, the Aryan origin theory was also an important element in the nationalist construction of a sense of identity. Besides Jones, H. T. Colebrooke and Max Müller explored the Indo-Aryan age of splendour. All of them were associated with the Asiatic society. Initially they engaged a pundit as an intermediator to translate and interpret Hindu laws and doctrines. But ultimately most of them like Wilkins, Jones and Colebrooke gained proficiency in the classical Sanskrit language. This learning authorized the Orientalist ‘sympathizers’ to search for ‘authentic’ data. Sanskrit was announced as a dead language restricted to the priestly caste and known for the convoluted corpus of literature (Schwab 31).

Initially, Vedic literature was approached through various travel accounts. Rennel’s lithograph of the Map of Hindoostan (sic) showed Britain receiving Shastras from Brahmans. William Jones reversed this symbol of Britain receiving native knowledge. He suspected the native pundits and therefore learned Sanskrit (Ludden 255-6). Now the colonizers could penetrate the maze of the Indian traditions and customs. The Orientalist mission was to deliver the degenerated form of Hinduism from superstitions, ignorance and “barbaric” customs. In this grandiose age, sati was a scathing custom and often associated with the cultural configuration of contemporary India (Mill ix: 185).

The documented accounts of the Orientalists about India’s ‘past’ hardly suffice to comprehend the nature of Indian culture. The images and symbols evoked through the glorification of the past burrowed deep into the psyche of the people. Tradition which is a “fixed referent, a repository of past culture was repeatedly resurrected to suit the prevailing political temper” (Sethi 19). The colonizers were not passive receptors. In order to awaken national consciousness they forged a national identity by rediscovering a
‘pristine’ past. The past became a paradigm of cultural and political differences. To beat the colonizers in their own game, history became a kind of sport in which “the alien colonial project of appropriation was matched equally by an indigenous nationalist project of counter-appropriation” (Guha, Dominance without Hegemony 3). The indignation and denigration that the colonial baggage contained was not passively received. Thus, nationalism was the consequence of ideological encounters between the native elements and colonial perceptions.

As a reaction of a dent to their self-esteem at the hands of the Orientalists, the nationalists asserted a ‘pristine’ cultural identity within the parameters of a Vedic/spiritual discourse. This promoted a tactic construction and the take over of the trope of imagination from Eurocentric to Indocentric activity. The nationalist discourse emerged from the mythical and religious connotations of India’s past. Faith, a political agenda in the guise of religion, manipulated and programmed a pan-Indian identity. The British relied on the selected Brahmanical texts and referred to the translated works of European travellers and Orientalist researchers. The entry into the religious domain “objectified” the religious beliefs and “enabled individual elements within it to be taken out and reformulated for conscious, often overtly political ends” (Cohn, Anthropologist 229). The nineteenth century spiritual/philosophers nourished the idea of ‘mystic’ India. The shastric authority fostered an Indian cultural space for a homogenized Hindu community. The borrowing of Orientalist renderings amongst the native intelligentsia was reflected in the monolithic ‘spirituality’ of India. The Orientalist presuppositions were adapted and adopted by reformers and spiritual leaders such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rammohan Roy, M. K. Gandhi, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and many others. They reflect the saturation of Orientalist assumptions of a ‘spiritual’ India.

I take these reformers one by one to argue that tradition was turned this way or that to suit the prevailing political temperament. Significantly, the Indian culture as perceived by the Orientalists was the consequence of the Brahmanical discourse, which the authoritative Orientalist narratives relied upon. However, the elite Brahmanical discourse was constructed and packaged in such a manner that it coincided with Orientalism’s “ideological claims” (Veer, “Foreign Hand” 27). Therefore, I emphasise on the elitist Brahmanical tendency implicit in the Indian tradition and the religious
philosophies of the spiritualist-turned nationalist gurus, who postulated Hinduism as otherworldly, pantheist and ascetic. With these objectives in mind, I argue in my subsequent chapters how the ‘essential’ India survived into the nationalist discourse of Gandhi and Nehru.

Vivekananda, in his endeavour to elevate Hinduism to a world religion, located the kernel of religiosity in the canonical sacred Sanskrit texts. He expounded neo-Vedanta philosophy. Whatever was depreciating in Indian culture was altered and given an affirmative image. The caste/varna system was conceived as a natural order and means of unifying the masses. Regarding the role of caste in building the Indian community, Vivekananda asserted: “Caste is a natural order [...]. That is the only natural way of solving life” (Vivekananda 3: 245-6). This philosophy turned to the hierarchical caste system and recuperated ancient India as a sacrosanct domain of the Vedic teachings. Such a notion was used by the native elites so as to construct and define ‘Indianness’ in terms of morality. Vivekananda’s doctrine was akin to Hindu nationalist discourse of cultural superiority. The spiritual conception of India endorsed by the Orientalists became a leitmotif for the Indian philosophers to forge cultural identity and self-awareness.

The Hindu acharyas of the nineteenth century expounded the Vedic philosophy that highlighted spirituality of India. The organizations like the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj read the instruction of the Vedas and unanimously agreed to the spiritual essence of India. Following the trajectory of Orientalism, Vivekananda, and subsequently Radhakrishnan, established neo-Vedanta or neo-Advaita as the main credo of Hinduism. It perceived Hinduism in totality. The heterogeneous beliefs were coined as fallacies of the basic Vedantic pedagogy. Vivekananda proposed Vedanta as single world religion that involved the subsumption of Buddhism and Jainism. At the World’s Parliament of Religions, he promulgated Hinduism as an overarching religion. The Vedas were universal treatises and the warehouse of Indian spiritual/eternal ideals. Vivekananda proclaimed the accommodating nature of the Vedas: “From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy [...] the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu’s religion” (Vivekananda “Paper on Hinduism”).
The *atman* and *Brahman* were inseparable and changeless. Vivekananda argued for the unchangeability of the consciousness and asserted that there is “but one *Atman*, one Self, eternally pure, eternally perfect, unchangeable [. . .] and all these various changes in the universe are but appearances in that one Self” (Vivekananda 2: 272). The ‘timeless’ and ‘spiritual’ tradition thus accentuated by Hindu religious discourse was incorporated in the national programme of consciousness raising. The native discourse reformulated the essentialist view of India under the banner of common ideals and goals. Vivekananda’s inclusivist approaches neutralized the medley of the Indian traditions. Apart from non-dualism and monotheism, Vivekananda was proud of toleration as an essential feature of Hinduism. It was Hinduism that had “taught the world both tolerance and universal tolerance” (1: 3).

Vivekananda endorsed spiritual India with mysticism and Western civilisation with materialism. He remarked: “When the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental [. . .]. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul [. . .] he must sit at the feet of the Orient to learn” (8: 325). Thus, Vivekananda retained the Occident-Orient polarity. In other words, Vivekananda distinguished between the Sanskritic tradition and the materialistic civilization of the West. In imagining a ‘pristine’ past, woman was iconised as Mother, “a site for the nation and, invested with divine power” (G. Sen 158). Tradition symbolised scriptures, women, and ‘timeless’ institutions of caste and village system. Accordingly, Vivekananda mythologized womanhood as a signifier of spiritual strength and chastity. The Aryan past was resurrected where “man and wife together offered their sacrifices [. . .]. In India it was female sage who first found the unity of God and laid down this doctrine in [. . .] the Vedas” (Cited in Chakravarti 77). Hence, the dichotomy between Eastern spirituality and Western materialism was maintained.

The Indian was split into two personalities; one pulled him towards the European progress/materialism, and the other, in its difference from the West, anchored him to indigenous roots. The Indian reformers too belonged to this ambiguous milieu. The colonial hangover prevented them from transcending the Oriental imaginations and their search for ‘pristine’ identity forced them to write back to the empire. Whatever was perceived as deformed in Indian civilization was given an affirmative image (Sethi 25).
To take the case of another traditionalist, Sri Aurobindo, one would have to analyse the revival of Indian antiquity in the struggle for freedom. The Indian was defined in terms of Aryan character and qualities. Aurobindo portrayed India within the spiritual and intellectual parameters. This spiritualism was the key to understanding India. Creativity and intellect were, for Aurobindo, eclipsed facets of the Indian traditions. India excelled in mathematics, surgery and metallurgy. It propounded many scientific theories much before the beginning of European scholarship thereby contributing towards modernity (Vijay 19-20). Aurobindo’s synthesis of modernity with tradition added another dimension to India’s fixity. He maintained a balance between the modern and the spiritual realms. The cultural reformers thus innovated a renaissance that dealt with modern problems along traditional lines (26-8).

Yet Aurobindo was brought up in an anglicised family. He had studied abroad in elite institutions and before gaining proficiency in his native language, he had learned Greek and Latin. Despite the fact that he defied Western materialism, it had become a part of his cultural self. His anti colonial struggle was “in identification and in counter-identification” (Nandy, Intimate Enemy 87) with the colonizer.

Quite in the vein of cultural revivalism, Aurobindo conjured the image of India as a motherland that was being oppressed by the West. He recorded:

> I know my country as mother. I offer her my devotion, my worship. If a monster sits upon her breast and prepares to suck her blood, what does her child do? [. . .]. I know I have in me the power to accomplish the deliverance of my fallen country [. . .]. It is the power of knowledge, Brahmatej. (92)

Women have been the locus for nationalist uprisings and the nation has been allegorised as Šakti, the divine figure. The nation has been equated to women and tradition both of which require protection from outside powers. Similar to Vivekananda’s conception of world religion, Aurobindo decoded Hinduism as the basis of a future world religion. It was considered as an amalgamation of “science and faith, Theism, Christianity [. . .] and yet is none of these” (Aurobindo 45). Vedic sacrifices for purity were transferred and articulated in the nationalist arena. Yoga was another traditional means to regain the lost
self-esteem. Brahmatej/Brahmanic potency was the consequence of asceticism and penances. Brahmatej was an alternative to European epistemology. The holistic view of Hinduism was informed by the Orientalists' perennial discourse on the recognition of a unified Indian civilisation based on shastrik authority (Veer, “Foreign Hand” 40).

Although the nationalist reformers endeavoured to present a ‘correct’ interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, yet it was in accordance with the holistic view of Hinduism as perpetuated by the Orientalists. The philosophies of Rammohan Roy and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan also underscore the influence of European narratives in the indigenous idioms.

Before examining Rammohan Roy as the progenitor of modern India who considered sati as an aberration from the ‘authentic’ scriptural past, it is imperative to understand the significance of the reform of traditions and by extension, the improvement of the status of women. As a symbol of tradition, women became a metonym for the entire Indian culture. Therefore, any attempt to reconstitute the Indian past simultaneously reworked upon the status of women. Orientalism privileged the analyses of scriptures and asserted its authority in “re-educating the ‘natives’ about their own culture” (Zutshi 89). In order to demonstrate their benevolence the Orientalists debated that the religious scripts did not sanction sati. The Orientalist works were pregnant with cultural findings on India. The significance of these cultural investigations was to demonstrate the disjunction between ancient textual codes and the prevalent customs. This discourse created a “textual hegemony” (Mani 96) that posited Europeans as saviours who had come to ‘rescue’ the ‘ignorant’ natives from degradation (Zutshi 90). In the production of a colonial discourse on sati the colonisers selectively cited certain interpretations of the indigenous pundits and authorised their ‘authenticity’ (Mani 99).

In accordance with his scriptural/textual bent, Rammohan wrestled with the idea of an ‘authentic’ Indian identity. Hinduism had been disfigured by the Brahmanical renderings. The cultural reformers insisted upon the purgation of moral and social evils associated with the misinterpretations of texts thereby inventing a cultural identity of a reformed nation. The Vedas had to be reworked upon. A holistic view of Hinduism was reinforced to maintain the status quo of Hindu identity. The Vedas were designated as
“prescriptive texts” (Mani 90). The tenets of Rammohan’s Brahm Samaj were theism, homogenous Hindu community, and non-idolatry. Together they endowed the traditional spirit of India with rational and scientific understanding. Nevertheless, the Indian traditions were reshaped and renovated along the European line of ‘rescue’ and reform.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s identification of an ascetic as a figure of authority restores the role of the renouncer in religion and subsequently in the political arena. The ideal of *sannyasin* was supplanted in the national movement. Religious idioms of celibacy, unity of Godhead and self-sacrifice were grafted on to the nationalist consciousness. The sustenance of was because of its “passive resistance, [...] tolerance” (S. Radhakrishnan 254). Like his predecessors, Radhakrishnan drew resemblances between Hinduism and other religions, hence relegating the non-Hindu and considering Hinduism as a barometer to measure the significance of the other religions.

By invoking the past, the reformers and spiritual gurus provoked people into action. Shared beliefs and common ancestry were the important determinants of national identity. A reference to the pre-existing notions of religion, in particular, aroused sentiments akin to what a person feels towards a family. This was central to national solidarity and communal consciousness. The denigration of Indian civilization made the quest for identity all the more pertinent. To liberate Indians from the awe of British culture, the traditional gurus evoked an assertion of a ‘pure’ past. They endorsed nationalistic modes of analysis in the understanding of Indian culture to dislodge the privileged position of Western epistemology. The modes consisted of reviving a Vedic/Aryan past that pictured India in mystical terms. The taming of the East and the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes classified the Other as the stark opposite to the European Self. This ‘spiritual’ India was a ‘site’ of power struggle between the colonizer and the colonized. The nationalists located India within the spiritual core, but unlike the colonisers they appealed to a common culture that united the masses and led them from subjugation to freedom.

The traditionalists/spiritualists were a class of the intelligentsia who gained “access to [...] past through translations and histories circulating through colonial discourse” (Niranjana 778). The spiritualists/reformist leaders used universalistic Hinduism as a tool to control and subordinate India to their knowledge of the ancient
scriptures. It was propounded that Hindu society needed a thorough overhauling and revival but the native elites were not ready to negate and identify their rich heritage with Western civilization. Therefore, the Indian traditionalists appropriated the Orientalist model and infused it with a feeling of national pride. India had been configured textually through the Western historical awareness. The anticolonial-nationalism backlashed in its claim to the ancient history/tradition. However, the nationalists in their indigenous claims to an ‘uncorrupted’ past related their self-identity to an antithetical European Other. This refurbished the colonial polarity between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Gandhi however gave a spiritual twist to the dichotomy in essentialising the ancient Indian civilisation as moral in contrast to the “Satanic” Western civilisation (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 34). The culturally uprooted nationalist, Nehru made efforts to ‘discover’ his ‘Indianness’ in his layered identity (Khilnani, Idea of India 171). He was compelled to use the Orientalist surveys and data in recovering his cultural self.

Paradoxically, this assertion was confined within the ambit of the Western sense of history. India was fixed in irreducible categories as “religiosity, non Westernness, nationhood” (Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories” 354). In the positioning of an ‘immutable’ and ‘eternal’ civilization, the anticolonial drive recognized the implication of historical knowledge. Culture, civilization, religion, history and the entire plethora of these ordained terms were used interchangeably by the “devotees of the past” (Dallmayr and Devy 25). The Indo-Aryan myth of common stock related the British to their subjects and relegated India to an embryonic stage of development that could only ascend to its ‘original’ stage—Aryan superiority—through the British rule.

Implicitly, however, the search for an ‘authentic’ India was restricted to the ruling coterie. It naively assumed that the research based on India did not require the knower’s involvement. However, nationalism deviated from this assumption and couched the political ideologies in the terms revival and reformation. Hindu reformers argued for a homogeneous and unified India undermining other philosophies and religions. It seemed inescapable for the nationalists to displace the stereotypes associated with the Indian past. They documented the bygone era using the European archives. Such narratives of Indian nationalism accentuated the Orientalist imaginations. In representing
India and re-inscribing the typecast endorsed by the Orientalists, one form of fixity was appropriated by another kind of fixity.

The regaining of lost self-esteem was not a simple throw away exercise of deeply embedded colonial mindsets. It involved the refiguration of the Indian essence. Obviously, to postulate nationalism entirely as a derivative discourse would be to undercut the popular consent it enjoyed. National sentiment was a trump card in the hands of the leaders, which stirred the masses and gained their approval. Orientalism, no doubt, influenced the nationalist imaginations, but it invited resistance from the natives. However, the ‘voyage’ undertaken by the nativists in cultural affirmation passed “through all the stations of European culture, in order to arrive ultimately at one’s own destination” (Verma 327). The colonisers believed it mandatory to gather knowledge about India for consolidating their rule. In comprehending Indian culture they created their own forms of knowledge. Such an epistemology bound the colonised in textual ‘facts’ and “reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms (Cited in Dirks, Castes of Mind 10). This practice of collecting information from a vast corpus of Indian classical literature, colonial surveys, the travelogues, colonial gazettes and data into an extensive textual knowledge about Indian made the colonial task of governance manageable.

The British tried to maintain and build a fine rapport with the natives, but in the long run, the relation slackened. The native idioms with religious underpinnings were “fashioned to combat the Orientalist assumptions” (Sethi 11). The native elites drafted ancient traditions as a bulwark to their ‘preserved’ identity and atoned for the suffering and humiliation at the hands of the colonizers. The study of India’s cultural antiquity followed the ideology of reformulating the Orientalists’ historical ‘truths’. The nationalists equally espoused the binary oppositions of the Self and the Other. Tradition, spirituality, otherworldliness, caste and the various categories that defined India distinguished it from its Other, the materialist, progressive and rational Europe. However, exclusion or inclusion was by no means simply a Western phenomenon. Within the Sanskritic/elitist tradition there was a similar tendency to devise strategies of polarities. The construction of a homogeneous religious element—Hinduism—neutralised the entire gamut of variegated Indian philosophies and religious sects.
Buddhism, Jainism and other sects were termed as tributaries of mainstream Hinduism. The nationalist project of a pan Indian identity sidelined the other minority religions in favour of an all-inclusive Hindu identity. In expunging the heterogeneous facets of the Indian traditions, nationalism preserved the antagonism between Hindu and non-Hindu identity. Significantly, it accentuated the contours of Western cultural identity by fashioning the Other.

Orientalism is enmeshed in the matrix of culture, traditions, power and representations. Therefore, without an understanding of the construction of traditions, Orientalism as a scholarly approach seems to be abstract. Religion, tradition and cultural identity often imbricate and are used synonymously. It is imperative to examine the use of traditions that reflect Orientalism as an academic discipline in the textualisation of religion. Tradition is not something that is given/received in an unadulterated state from one generation to another. Enroute they are imported with various symbols and meanings. Tradition is “invented by [. . .] cultural vanguards” and changes periodically for ideological convenience (Kapur 49).

The Europeans textualised the oral Indian traditions and transformed it into a historical enterprise. The Indian intelligentsia deduced the Indian traditions from the commentaries and translations of the Vedas, which had “totally disappeared from the plains of Aryavarta” but had been restored and “brought...to our doors” by the Europeans (J. Sarkar 84). The Sanskrit tradition was reintroduced to the Hindu elite. The Indo-Aryan origin myth and the valour associated with the Aryan race subsequently became an Orientalist legacy for the nationalists. Max Müller propounded the Vedas as the nucleus of Hindu religion that regulated their thoughts and precepts. As a comparative philologist, Max Müller theorized the Aryan as “rulers of history” whose mission was “to link all parts of the world together by the chains of civilization and religion” (Cited in Chakravarti 40). It was against this backdrop that the notion of the ‘glorious’ ancient Indian past sprang. The early nineteenth century reformers deployed reforms for the ‘dilapidated’ Hinduism without rupturing the Orientalist fantasy of Hindu community.

The foundation of Orientalism lay in its attempt to valorise the ‘spiritual’ East. The West conceived the Indian culture in its own paradigms and subsequently contrasted
it with Western prototype. This attitude of identification and difference perpetuated disjuncture between contemporary and ‘ideal’ India. It raised a perception that only the advent of European power could rescue and revive India’s ‘lost’ glory. The Orientalist investigation of the Indian past coincided with the production of the European literature on India and hence the imposition of a knowledge that impressed the cultural superiority of the ruler. There was a proximity between Orientalism and nationalism, since these schools of thought culturally contested and effected cultural transformation in “receiving [. . .] other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be” (Said, Orientalism 67).

The Westerners responded to Indian religion as they would to Judaeo-Christian religions and construed a coherent tradition from an amorphous heritage. The Christian model insisted on monotheism and a single foundational religious text (R. King 99-100). Thus, the putative uniformity of Indian religion fashioned and formatted the colonised in terms of a monolithic Hindu identity. Such an “imagined community” (Anderson 6) configured Hinduism central to the Indian tradition with Buddhism, Jainism and other sects relegated to the margins.

The cultural revivalists settled on religion to ‘discover’ a basis for unity and artificial cohesive ideology. The spiritualists gained insight into India’s past through English education since it “familiarized the Indian with [. . .] modes of representation that came to be accepted as natural” (Niranjana 778). The cultural traits standardized by the master narrative were accepted and utilized to create cultural resistance against the colonial authority. The spiritual narratives of the Indian gurus were a response to the decadent picture of India, which the Orientalists had promulgated. For instance, Hindu life had been socially organized into four varnas, four stages of life. The highly organized life was an answer to India’s illogical foundations.

In spite of the unified, yet divergent interpolations of the Indian past, no ‘true’ definition of Hinduism emerged. There were anomalies between the textual definition of Hinduism and the popular manifestation of religion. Within the Hindu sects there were various schools of thought with different beliefs and versions. For instance, Brahmanism taboos the consumption of alcohol and meat but contrary to it were the inscriptions of “Vedic texts where brahmanas consumed beef and took soma” (Thapar 15). Orientalism
refashioned India in its own script and fostered the later nationalist acharyas to resist the colonial intrusion. Interestingly, the idea of anchoring India to its antiquity emerged “from the treasure chest of Orientalism” that imagined the nation in terms of “ageless rural simplicity and moral continuity” (Ludden 271).