Chapter 2

Hind Swaraj and Gandhian Nationalism

As demonstrated in the introduction, the definition of India, in religious idioms, clarifies the congruity between Orientalism and nationalism. Through this chapter, I will elucidate the collusion and antithesis between the Orientalist and the nationalist school of thought. Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* or, *Indian Home Rule* written in ten days between 13 and 22 Nov 1909, aboard the ship ‘Kildonan Castle’, on the author’s return from England to South Africa, was the first text translated into English by Gandhi himself. The purpose was his impulsiveness to convey to the British his vision and, by extension, the vision of the people of India, that of “Home Rule”. He was so impatient to send his ideas across that he ambidextrously wrote the manuscript (Parel, M. K. Gandhi xiv).

*Hind Swaraj* was originally written in Gujarati and published in the *Indian Opinion*. The first twelve chapters were published on 11 December 1909 and the remaining eight were published seven days after. It was issued as a booklet on January 1910, but proscribed in India by the Government of Bombay on 24 March 1910. However, it was translated by Gandhi into English and issued by the International Printing Press, Phoenix (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 10: 245). *Hind Swaraj* is an exposition of Gandhi’s ideas on *swaraj*, civilization and his vision of India. It influenced Gandhi’s later works on political theory. *Hind Swaraj* was a manifesto and elaboration of Gandhi’s ideas on moral regeneration and political emancipation of India. Before writing *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote to Lord Ampthill giving a preview of his arguments. He mentioned that the content of his work would be “the result of (his) observations […] on the nationalist movement among (his) countrymen” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 9: 508). *Hind Swaraj* was a first-step guidebook for the attainment of *swaraj*. As Gandhi asserted, the nationalist consciousness was “not ripe” and it was indispensable for him to recast it through moral regeneration (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 16).

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi addresses the Indians in general, civilization elites like doctors and lawyers who were highly influenced by Western civilisation in particular, the extremists and the moderates of the Indian National Congress and the British. Unlike the moderates and the extremists, he held the Indians responsible for their enslavement.
Gandhi mentioned that the English were in India not because they were strong, but “we (Indians) keep them” (35). Hind Swaraj is stamped with the wrongdoings of the Indian youths in South Africa who were misdirected towards terrorism. Gandhi wrote Hind Swaraj keeping in mind these aggressive/violent youths. The popularity and wide acceptance of the manifesto of Hind Swaraj's finds a mention in Gandhi’s Autobiography. To strengthen the Civil Disobedience movement, Gandhi suggested the sale of Hind Swaraj, the proceeds of which “were to be utilized for furthering the civil disobedience campaign” (M. Gandhi, Autobiography 385). Besides clarifying the meaning of swaraj, the condemnation of modern civilization, pressing for the reconciliation between the extremists and the moderates, Gandhi discarded bodily pursuits to enable virtuous living. He attributed India’s failure to the unrestrained immorality imbibed from modern civilization. This civilization had built up a society that increased the market’s productivity thereby enhancing the wealth of the upper class. But the conditions of the lot remained neglected. Gandhi disputed that to bridge the gap and inequality, which the industrial civilization had established, a thorough moral overhauling was compulsory. For Gandhi, Hind Swaraj was a booklet that was a “severe condemnation of modern civilization” (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 15).

The narrative adopted in Hind Swaraj is in the form of a discursive dialogue between the reader and the editor. The editor answers all the queries related to the meaning of swaraj and the reader is all set to indulge in a meaningful dialogue to clarify the oft-repeated term swaraj. The narrative so constructed is a faithful record of the conversations Gandhi had with the workers (17). Gandhi, the England returned barrister, fights as a defence lawyer against the “diseased” Western civilisation (41). The text under study is neither a personal account nor simply a political treatise. It appears to be a spiritualised-political-pedagogic booklet rather than a moral science school text.

In Hind Swaraj, the core purpose was to define and clarify the meaning of swaraj. Swaraj was self-questioning and improvement. Gandhi differentiated between political independence and his idiom of swaraj: Political independence might drive the English out of Indian soil, but leave their corrupted colonial apparatus for the Indians to rule (26). Swaraj was self-interrogation. The political vocabulary of independence differed from that of swaraj. Gandhi considered the use of the “foreign” word
“independence” as a “sacrilege” and further contested that swaraj “is infinitely greater and includes independence” (Cited in Iyer, Essential Writings 352). Swaraj was freedom from within through self-examination/interrogation. It was to realise the moral responsibility towards the nation and the individual. These alternative discourses were central to the critique of Western civilization encapsulated in Hind Swaraj. Gandhi altered European dialectics of knowing the Self through the Other.

In this chapter, I shall be explicitly dealing with the binary oppositions of Self and Other constructed in Gandhi’s political discourse. In addition, I shall take Gandhi as a “critical traditionalist” to posit his construction of an alternative discourse, which oscillated between traditionalism and Western modernity (Parekh, Colonialism 35). The promotion of an alternative discourse is not a power-divorced formula. Hence, an examination of Gandhi’s discourse emanating from traditional and Western sources shall clarify the pedagogic and epistemological tenor inherent in his religious strictures.

Orientalism too is an epistemological phenomenon that culturally and politically constructs the Orient as the Other of the Western Self. Gandhi’s nationalism reworked Indian traditions, (re)formed, and twisted them for the attainment of swaraj. He maintained the binary opposition of the Self and the Other. However the Other was not an external, but a loss of self esteem in the past cultural achievements. In other words, Western civilisation had penetrated the native mind. It was this Other—the native—‘corrupted’ by Western influence that was the mainstay of Gandhi’s binary codes.

Though the critical traditionalist did not defend every doctrine of Hindu religion, yet the (re) construction was within the Hindu tradition. This tradition signified India’s spiritual strength, which was pitted against Western materialism. Interestingly, the imperial masters propagated the idea of India as religiously obsessive. It was thus established by the Orientalists that the Indian mindset was theosophical and relied on spiritual myths. Gandhi followed the colonial trajectory, but by the use of indigenous motifs carved his niche among the masses. In this context, it is essential to trace the religious, traditional and ethical precepts that runs throughout the nationalist imaginations and transfix India in a spiritual essence. Since the fixation of India in religious idioms had been a predominant concern with the Orientalists and subsequently the nationalists, hence it is these idioms/ motifs that shall be among the salient features
of this chapter and illustrate the element of ambivalence that characterises Gandhi’s political theory.

Religion had been a basis of the Orientalist perception of India’s past. Hindu religion was studied in the Vedas and other scriptures. In fact, Orientalism could intrude Indian cultural space by interpreting Hindu religious texts. Often religion was used interchangeably with Indian traditions. As examined in the previous chapter, tradition was the ground on which the two sides of the colonial divide could discover/re-discover an ‘authentic’ Indian identity. Gandhi’s political theory was intertwined with Indian religious philosophy and his own interpretation. Although, Gandhi spoke incoherently since he had a wide gap between his front teeth, he attracted large public gatherings because of his symbolic language, peasant-like-simple attire and religious idioms. He understood that nationalist consciousness could be stirred by traditional and religious idioms. In assigning a sacred connotation to the word *swaraj*, Gandhi’s spiritualization of politics tended to engineer a distinctive Indian identity. The European word, ‘independence’ could not match the indigenous and vedic word, *swaraj*. ‘Independence’ implied freedom, which was external, whereas *swaraj* meant spiritual /internal liberation. As Gandhi proclaimed: “The root meaning of swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may therefore be rendered as a discipline rule within […] . Independence may mean license to do as you like […] word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule, and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 45: 263-4). Although I do not deny the crucial role played by the nationalists in the freedom movement, yet Orientalism’s cognitive systems cannot be ignored. Taking into account these forms of representations, my work scrutinizes the (re)discovery of India (Hind) structured by Gandhi’s formulations. His mission of freedom and his spiritual journey began simultaneously. Gandhi extended self-interrogation to the understanding of the nation. He believed that when unwanted desires are restrained, the nation could attain *swaraj*. Gandhi believed that it was temptation that welcomed the traders as rulers. They were dragged to solve the internal disputes and honoured as Company Bahadur. The same temptation forced the Indian youth to mimic European civilization.
In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi espouses Indian spirituality as intrinsic to the attainment of *swaraj*. Indeed Gandhi’s political language was pregnant with ethico-religious terms that had been extracted from religious scriptures, but used innovatively. Certain words like *swaraj*, *tapasya*, *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* borrowed from Indian religious philosophy promoted collective Hindu identity. In this way, the British were polarised as materialistic, who lacked moral strength, which qualified India as superior. European Indologists relied on Hindu scriptures—the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Gita*—and were able to impress upon a spiritual concept of India. The religious texts formed the basis of imagining India in essentialist terms. The spiritualism ‘discovered’ in the texts conceived India either “as the homeland of a great spiritual philosophy that had something important to teach Europe” or it typecast India as “unworldly and incapable of self-government” (Heehs, “Centre of the Religious Life” 69). The Orientalists passed on the privileging of the religious texts to Indian social reformers and nationalists.

Though Ruskin, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and various other Western thinkers influenced Gandhi’s political philosophy (as explained subsequently in this chapter), he fantasized India to be run on organised lines of *Ram Rajya*. The policy of adherence to and reformulation of traditions resulted in a schizophrenic cultural identity. I shall demonstrate this split in identity by examining Gandhi’s nativistic and eclectic borrowings. As a Western educated elite, Gandhi adopted European norms of liberty and equality. However he couched them in native idioms and redefined the traditional tropes. In this context Gandhi wrote:

> What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the Gita and the spirit of Hinduism [. . .]. The Gita itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to karma, sannyasa, yajna, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 63: 339)

Certainly, the Indians articulated their cultural identity and it was in no manner imitation of the West, yet the indigenous claim of self-identity followed the “discovery of Vedic and Vedantic texts by European orientalists” (Heehs, “Centre of the Religious Life” 76).
The religious metaphor of the cow, considered holy in Hindu philosophy, impinged upon the imagination of a unified Hindu community. Incorporating the idea of India with religious themes, a nationalist ideology was posited. Following the traditional symbol, Gandhi remarked: “India is all you have, call her daughter or mother, what you will. You can get much from her and give her much. You will receive a hundred times more than you give. She is a Kamadhuk” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 14: 1). Another symbol of evoking Hindu identity was that of Lord Rama, which subsequently became a nationalist symbol of political governance. Emphasising the relevance of morality and de-centralisation of power, Gandhi defined *Ram Rajya* as, “not [ . . . ] a mere imitation of the British House of Commons”, but as “sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority” (Cited in Rothermund 132). Gandhi alludes to the myth of Lord Rama and expresses “the ancient ideal of Ramraj” as “true democracy” (131). Gandhi resorted to the essences of Orientalist thought, for he proclaimed India to be a holy land (*Ramrajya*) (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 62). India was modelled on the principle of *Ramrajya*—an exclusive site un-contaminated by European civilisation. At the hands of the colonisers, politics was the means of exercising control, but in his ideal of *Ramrajya* Gandhi desired a moral philosophy that would dictate the mores of the society. His sense of community was premised on the moral duty of every citizen to return the debts to the ancestors who had consciously/unconsciously contributed to the society (Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy 207-8). The past, combined with religion, moved and activated the potential energy of the people. Gandhi revived Indian culture through the use of ‘indigenous’ themes and motifs. Traditions couched in his native idioms were an alternative to received knowledge systems.

Gandhi, no doubt, does not adopt a dogmatic approach to assert his concept of nation. Although he manages to give his vision of India in Hind Swaraj and later in his Autobiography in the form of a ‘Constructive programme’, it unravels Gandhi as a political spokesman who believed freedom could be achieved only by following the ‘prescription’ of self-purification and observance of non-violence. The relation of *swaraj* to self-discipline/self-control was used interchangeably in all his statements on the subject. *Swa* (self) is derived from the Sanskrit *atman* (Williams 1275). The word carries metaphysical and ethical connotations in Hindu thought. The sublime vocabulary was
effective in the nationalist uprising against the rulers. Swaraj could basically be obtained by spiritual self-control rather than the colonial idiom of control by coercive forces.

With Gandhi, the idealized past was an incarnation of spiritual achievements and moral superiority. The revival of the ancient tradition was an “attempt to measure the new society with the old patriarchal yardstick, the desire to find a model in the old order and traditions” (Chatterjee, “Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society” 173). Morality, tolerance, pristine identity, good conduct, self-control all remain the synonyms for swaraj. The relation Gandhi configures between the self and the nation was that the purification of the self resulted in de-contamination of the nation from Western influence. By condemning the “cursed modern civilization” (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 56), Gandhi defined “real Home Rule” (74). Self-purification was one of the essentials for self-control. Gandhi glorified the past to retain India’s spiritual authority. Descending from Vivekananda’s spiritual assertions to Radhakrishnan’s forging of unique Hindu cultural identity, Gandhi too developed a spiritual cliché. Advocating his essences he maintained: “Just as in the West, they have made discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul”. Further, the survival of Hinduism was because of its development “along [. . .] spiritual lines” (Cited in Fox 10).

The colonizers had punctured Indian tradition. Hence, nationalism was a response to European essentialisation of India. Spirituality was modified into internal improvement that vehemently attacked selfishness spawned by Western materialism. The ethical elevation required self-discipline, which was premised on “soul”/“Truth” force (M. Gandhi Hind Swaraj 68). In Gandhi’s vocabulary, swaraj was the coalition of inner transformation and national strength. The life-denial/renunciation philosophy was incorporated into the political terrain. Vivekananda expounded Vedas as scripture for world religion and emphasized on the manly Aryan virtues required to revitalize Hinduism (Basu 111). In contrast to Vivekananda’s masculinity, Gandhi feminised his discourse. He emphasised that the colonial aggressiveness could be countered by the use of passive resistance. Gandhi’s spiritual bent towards atmashuddhi or inner purification attempted to metamorphosise Hinduism from a religious orientation to the political movement of freedom. For instance, the control of the self was directed towards sexual
restraint, which was essential for total involvement in the freedom movement. As Gandhi believed, *brahmacharya* was the “greatest discipline without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 75). In keeping with Hindu tradition, Gandhi selectively incorporated *brahmacharya*—one of the tenets of asceticism—in his political philosophy.

The key to self-rule, as understood by Gandhi, was passive resistance attainable through the control of passions. In Gandhi’s terminology, passive resistance was the essential ‘indigenous’ feature of India; “any other rule is foreign rule” (74). Passive resistance through “personal suffering” was the outcome of the “soul force”. It involved self-sacrifice contrary to the “brute force” (71). Sacrifice of the self was an integral component of the Hindu *dharma*. So essential was self-control in Gandhian political theory that anyone deprived of self-control was considered “unfit to serve the country” (54). In fact, the Orientalists too stressed upon the passive character of the Indians. In contrast to Gandhi’s nationalist discourse the passivity highlighted by the Orientalists justified colonisation as a civilisation mission.

Gandhi fantasized India as a self-sufficient village ‘uncorrupted’ by modern civilization. Regarding modern civilisation, Gandhi writes in *Hind Swaraj*: “Civilisation is like a mouse gnawing while it is soothing us” (39). While debunking and negating his experiences of modern civilization, Gandhi’s perennial self-quest and meditation morally realigned it. His metaphysical abstractions were to straitjacket India within the foundational grid of representation. James Mill, wrote on the topic of non-violence:

> I have not enumerated the religion of the Hindusm [. . .] . This religion has produced a practice which has strongly engaged the curiosity of Europeans [. . .] . A Hindu lives in perpetual terror of killing [. . .] all witnesses agree in representing him [. . .] with more apparent capacity of supporting pain. (Cited in Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India” 410)

In this regard, Ronald Inden makes a noteworthy remark, “I doubt very much, for example, if Gandhi’s concept of non-violence would have played the central part it did in
Indian nationalism had it not been singled out long also as a defining trait of the Hindu character" (408).

The non-violent movement spearheaded by Gandhi was loaded with religious vocabulary. Any “deviation in thought or deed was necessarily defiling, and every defilement called for a reimposition of soul control” (Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony* 149). Non-violence, constructed by Europeans, was the distinguishing trait of Hindu character that Gandhi appropriated into a highly charged political movement. The capacity of supporting pain was the kernel of Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsa*. The nineteenth-century spiritualists considered tolerance and non-violence an essential contribution of Hinduism. The Brahmical concept of *tapasya* profoundly instructed Gandhi’s political discourse. It was Gandhi’s contention that, “*satyagraha* is nothing but *tapasya* for Truth” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 19: 80). Self-sacrifice for the sake of nation was imagined as *tapasya*. It required courage and fearlessness. The religious terms were fashioned to consolidate Gandhi’s proclamations. His creed of non-violence involved *tapasya*/sacrifice of self that was “infinitely superior to sacrifice of others” (71). Gandhi’s non-violence theory was interpreted as:

> The examination of religious and native idioms in Gandhi’s discourse elucidate that he worked on the binary oppositions in describing Indian civilization as religion-centred in opposition to European civilization beset with immorality and materialism. In negating the Orientalist stereotypes, Gandhi “inverted myths of Western superiority with his version of traditional Truth” (Ludden 271). His version of counter-culture worked on ‘indigenous’ motifs without negating the cultural fixity assigned by the colonizers. In other words, his nationalism produced a discourse, which not only challenged the colonial political domination, but also accepted their intellectual premises.

The most distinctive and the largest contribution of Hinduism to India’s culture is the doctrine of *ahimsa* [. . .] its teaching has so far permeated our people that an armed revolution has almost become an impossibility [. . .] the tradition of *ahimsa* has struck deep roots among the people. (Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings* 1: 455)
Gandhi’s juxtaposition of the past and pristine Indian civilization with the present “diseased” civilization since the advent of the Europeans, was to emphasize the ‘uncontaminated’ and ‘uncorrupted’ Indian civilization “immovable” in her glory (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 54). In Gandhi’s narratives, the ‘indigenous’ idioms, extracted from religious sources, sometimes overlapped with Western readings. Ironically, it was “through an eclectic synthesis of western counter-cultural thinkers” that Gandhi articulated his ‘indigenous’ political ideology (Young, *Postcolonialism* 320). Therefore, besides examining the native/traditional influences on Gandhi’s politics, an assessment of Western literary influences shall reveal his cultural predicament. As Ashis Nandy postulates, the Mahatma was neither a “genuine son of the soil” nor a “total atypical Indian” (*At the Edge Of Psychology* 83). Evidently, the authors and their books that Gandhi recommended for perusal in *Hind Swaraj*’s appendix is a validation of his wide range of Western readings. Each work influenced his ideologies mapped in *Hind Swaraj*. In *What is Art?* Tolstoy expounds art as a symbol of experiences and feelings that spring from religious perceptions (Tolstoy 123, 286). His teachings played a pivotal role in shaping Gandhi’s understanding of symbols and its associated meanings. For instance, the spinning wheel was a symbol of selfless service and welfare of all (Parel, *M. K. Gandhi* xxxviii). Tolstoy’s emphasis on blaming the Indians for their enslavement evoked a deep response in Gandhi. In Tolstoy’s *Letter to a Hindoo* (sic) in the appendix to *Hind Swaraj*, Tolstoy recognized the conformity and submission of the Indians to European power. Gandhi too partakes Tolstoy’s assertion (xxxix). Gandhi attributed the advocacy of non-violence to Tolstoy. As he observed:

Tolstoy was a great advocate of non-violence in his age. I know of no author in the West who has written as much and as effectively for the cause of non-violence as Tolstoy has done. I may even go further and say that I know no one in India or elsewhere who has had as profound an understanding of the nature of non-violence as Tolstoy. (Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings* 1: 116)

Besides Tolstoy, Ruskin was the nineteenth-century critic of industrial civilization who made inroads into Gandhi’s political philosophy. Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* postulated modern political economy. This work of Ruskin was serialized in the *Indian Opinion*. 
entitled *Sarvodaya*. Ruskin’s economics was patterned not on a competitive society, but on compassion. Gandhi reformulated Ruskin’s economic philosophy and in place of compassion used dāva—a Sanskritised idiom. Unlike the European economy, it morally and politically empowered the Indians. Ruskin’s “humane economy” was integrated with traditional idioms like *sarvodaya* and *swaraj* to form an assimilated Gandhian philosophy. On the basis of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*, Gandhi founded the Phoenix settlement, in South Africa an epitome of ashrams or well-knit communities (Parel, M. K. Gandhi xi-xl).


In *A New Crusade*, Blount made it mandatory for his readers to wear homespun for the betterment of society (Parel, M. K. Gandhi xlii). Perhaps it inspired Gandhi with swadeshi or domestic economics. Manchester had drained India’s handicrafts. In doing so, it had uprooted the ‘indigenous’ economy. Ruskin’s condemnation of capitalist political economy and G. K. Chesterton’s repudiation of Indian nationalism as an imitation of Western models, all influenced the course of his political actions. In other words, Western influenced readings of Gandhi “emerged from a rereading of the colonial archive” (Prakash, “Introduction” 7).

Another work listed in his appendix to *Hind Swaraj* was Taylor’s *The Fallacy of Speed*. It defied the prevalent notion that progress was in speed. The advent of railways and the consequent migration from the villages to the cities deteriorated the health conditions. Gandhi took this argument further and blacklisted railways in his ideal picture of India. He argued: “Good travels at snail’s pace” whereas “evil has wings.” Therefore, railways propagated evil. This concept was founded on Gandhi’s understanding of traditional India. Since Gandhi believed that travel on foot was
conducive to the spiritual spirit of India, therefore the ancestors of ancient Indian civilization travelled “either on foot or on bullock-carts” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 42). This natural mode of locomotion enabled them to mingle with their fellow beings and hence was crucial in developing a sense of community. It was these *acharyas* who implanted the idea of India as “one undivided land” (43). The railways created divisions and accentuated natural calamities. Amazingly, the railways subjected to Gandhi’s attacks were the means of spreading the anti-raj messages (R. Gandhi, *Good Boatman* 162). It is noteworthy how the denunciation of the railways seeks parallel with the Brahmanical model of “holy/unholy” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 42). The Brahmanical discourse of holy/unholy, purity/impurity was a recurring theme of Gandhi’s spiritual ideology. I shall examine this elitist discourse while tracing caste and village as fundamental to Indian civilisation.

Gandhi believed villages to be the republics of India. His spiritual governance was premised on his mythical and fantasized visions of India, a holy place where religion reigned. Gandhi envisaged and construed India as a village, for he believed that, “we are inheritors of a rural civilization” (Cited in Fox 56). It is no wonder that *Hind Swaraj* includes an extract on village India by Sir William Wedderburn which configures Indian villages as “ancient institutions which is the natural social unit and the best type of rural life: self-contained [. . .] peace-loving, conservative in the best sense of the word” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 97-8). Gandhi draws in *Hind Swaraj* the data provided by Sherard’s *White Slaves of England*. It contained emotional accounts of the industrial workers. The industries had decapitated and dehumanised society. The affluent in their greed for profits ignored the sufferings of the workers (Parel, M. K. *Gandhi* xlv).

Mazzini’s *Duties of Man*, helped in articulating Gandhi’s discourse on non-violence. It evinced that violence was a short-lived mode to achieve freedom since it merely exchanged one despot for another. Although violence did free Italy, the state of the people remained unchanged. According to Gandhi, Mazzini rebelled against the use of violence and instead was steadfast on his perceptions that “every man must learn how to rule himself” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 60). Interestingly, the European textual accounts, that circulated the idea of an essentialised India, were endorsed by Gandhi and retained India as a textual subject.
When Gandhi essentialises passive resistance in *Hind Swaraj* as a speciality of India, the peasants and the villagers find a mention as if India is a village or Marx’s self-contained communities. (Marx and Engels 350) contaminated by the presence of alien coercive forces that had penetrated the ‘pristine’ agrarian Indian community. India’s fixity promoted by Orientalism and sustained by the nationalists, was also in the construction of Indian villages. For the nationalists, the village became an “elemental unit of empirical and theoretic reference” (Ludden 266). They were the centres of ‘pristine’ and ‘uncontaminated’/‘preserved’ cultures.

During the rise of the Indian National Movement, reform enabled self-awareness spawned by the Orientalist researchers. British colonialism was a cultural project of control, in which colonial knowledge helped in “constructing an India that could be better packaged, subsumed, and ruled” (Cohn, Colonialism x). The colonisers attempted to study the Indian traditions that coincided with cultural identity. The nineteenth-century Indian social reformers took the revival of self-identity as a starting point and addressed the issue of the loss of cultural identity, associated with colonial rule. In the coloniser/colonised negotiations of cultural identity the nationalists/reformers were able to “develop a deep self-reflexivity about their tradition” (Aniya Sen 3). Orientalists depicted the Indian villages as an eternal institution of India. The Sanskrit scholar, Monier-Williams wrote on the Indian villages: “It has existed almost unaltered since the description of its organisation in Manu’s code [ ... ] . It has survived all the religious, political and physical convulsions from which India has suffered from time immemorial [ ... ] but the simple, self-contained Indian township has preserved its institution intact” (Cited in Inden, Imagining India 134). In this regard, the Indian villages were an indigenous social structure central to the understanding of traditional Indian society. Western sociologists either condemned the villages for “stagnatory” (Marx and Engels 350) life or equated “true” India to the village communities (Müller 7). The nation-builders settled on villages as an important constituent of the nationalist imagination. Gandhi’s rural India was an alternative to European civilisation. In contrasting the village to the urban life, Gandhi effectively evoked the idea of ‘corruption’ and immorality synonymous with the Brahmanical idioms of holy/unholy. Such an ideology of difference was essential to India’s esteemed cultural identity. Arguing about the villages as uncorrupted moral institutions of India, Gandhi wrote: “villagers go to
Bombay, work under unhealthy and often immoral conditions, then return to their villages [. . .] bringing with them their corruption, drunkenness and disease” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 33: 15). Marx’s perspectives on the static Indian villages contributed in portraying the Indian society as despotic, (Marx and Engels 350) whereas Gandhi emphasised the eternity of village community as integral to the preservation of India’s moral strength. As Gandhi remarked:

We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before [. . .]. It was not that we did not know that if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 55)

Following the same thesis, Marx cited the British official report: “the boundaries of the village have been but seldom altered [. . .] the same interest and even the same families, have continued for ages” (Marx and Engels 350). Gandhi admired the same old plough, cottages and education system that had existed in antiquity. On the contrary, Marx dismissed the “vegetative” Indian past. Gandhi’s indigenism opposed Marx’s quintessence of village India. Both the Orientalists and the nationalists took the strands of Indian society from antiquity, they resurrected their own image of village India.

Gandhi idealised the past Indian society where: “The home life, that is, the village was undisturbed by the periodical visitations from barbarous hordes. Maine has shown that India’s villages were a congeries of republics” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 71: 4). Remarkably, Maine’s reference with respect to village republic conveys Orientalism as a prime mover of Gandhi’s vision of India. This idealisation of the village republics corresponds with William Jones’s categorisation of Hindu who “in some early age [. . .] were [. . .] happy in government; wise in legislation and eminent in various knowledge” (Cited in D. Smith 74).

Resisting the indulgences and passions associated with materialism, Gandhi pronounces morality as intrinsic to swaraj. The emphasis on purity throughout Gandhi’s discourse reflects the centrality given to ethical connotations. In this manner,
spiritualism/purity was antithetically aligned with Western materialism. This dichotomy
defended Indian cultural identity. The discourse on purity expressed in resisting
machines, passions, European economy and institutions assigned a moral superiority to
indigenous alternative narratives. Gandhi's picture of swaraj transformed from a singular
vision to a common set of values and beliefs. For instance: "The Swaraj that I wish to
picture," (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 59) modifies into the voice of the people who
demand, "We want our own ancient schools [. . .] to be restored" (88). These supposedly
shared beliefs and values refurbished India in an imaginative dimension. Such a premise
fuelled a collective and universal drive against the modern civilisation. The concern with
the moral character, the contrast between coward and moral courage runs throughout
Gandhi's works.

As opposed to Western brand of nationalism, swaraj was not only political
autonomy but economic and cultural too. Satyagraha was a programme of national self-
purification to instil courage into the people for national regeneration. The authority
exercised by the state on its subjects was severely condemned. The conflation of politics
with ethics in terms of polarities is highly evocative in the Hind Swaraj: "The tendency
of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is
to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God"
(57). Any intrusion into the imagined realm of Gandhi's swaraj was disavowed as a sin.
In this context he writes: "Those who want to change conditions such as I have described
are enemies of the country and are sinners" (56). Since Gandhi's discourse was
embedded in spiritual overtones, he used the word "sin", a transgression against divine
principles of morality.

Gandhi condemned Western civilization diseased by the excessive use of the
machines. Machines enslaved men and provided the leisure to think evil. The tendency to
differentiate East from the rest was founded on the morality versus immorality principle.
Gandhi cornered British colonialism on the basis of its immoral civilization. Gandhi
consistently developed a moral tone in his political discourses. Morality was interlocked
with Gandhi's thesis on swaraj. Machine craze had deprived several of the Indian
labourers. Unemployment bred ignorance and compelled the deprived classes to indulge
in sexual vice and hence remain ignorant of India's pitiable state. Therefore, Gandhi
wanted to revive the “ancient” and the “sacred” handlooms. These primitive machines engaged people and made them self-sufficient (84).

Gandhi’s critiques were not limited to machines, but also to the form of Western government. The Parliament, for instance, is compared to a “prostitute” that periodically changes its position from one policy to another (28). Akin to the industries, this bourgeois form of government relied on self-interest and manipulated laws in its favour. Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* gives his idea of India as a nation, with the inducement of the word *praja* (Parel, *M. K. Gandhi Hind* liii). Thus, the indianisation/Sanskritisation of the word nation bespeaks of Gandhi’s traditional notion that imagined India in religious terms. *Swaraj* by no means was a replacement of one imperial government with that of another. It was for Gandhi a grounded organization in the form of village communities and *panchayats*. Gandhi was a severe critic of the parliamentary form of government, which according to him was for the vested interests of the politicians. These politicians were responsible for the political parties than for the welfare of the people. Gandhi’s non-statist perception, that is, his castigation of state governance was not a diffusion of political authority. Instead of a central authority, there were the *Satyagrahi* leaders to discipline the masses. Nevertheless, his rural reconstruction programme, to transform the society, was a variant of the institutionalisation he rebutted. “It is difficult to become a passive resister unless the body is trained”, in writing so, Gandhi laid down rules for a passive resister “to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth and cultivate fearlessness” (M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 75).

Gandhi not only criticized European state apparatus, but also the emerging Indian middle-class-doctors and lawyers. Gandhi’s disciplinary leadership operated in the form of ‘soul’ control exemplified in his condemnation of doctors in *Hind Swaraj*: The temptation towards Western materialism made the elite subservient to European colonialism. Through this class of the elite, Gandhi wanted to refute consumptions and indulgences that infect the soul. Another target of his reformation was the lawyer’s profession. The underlying principle was self-discipline. Self-discipline was a continuous and consistent strand throughout Gandhi’s political discourse.

Gandhi’s alternative doctrine for Indian economy, proposed in *Khadhi* economics, was to replace industrialization with the agrarian and small-scale cottage
industries. It was justified on the moral grounds of selfless service to mankind. Gandhi’s retaliation against British economic system was not limited to the ethical dimension but it was intended to destabilize the superstructure of ideologies and institutions. India was reduced to a self-sufficient nation that could formulate its economic principles by restructuring the indigenous economic system. The Indians were attracted by the “Satanic” influences of Western civilization (34). However, by restraining desires and wants swaraj could be attained. Thus, moral purification and character building became the standards for a true Home Rule. Spinning helped in purging off the sins under the Western influence, but the hidden agenda was to improve or rather ‘civilise’ the masses. In reiterating that Home Rule was attainable in following the principles of swadeshi movement, Gandhi made swadeshi a prerequisite for swaraj (84).

Gandhi did favour national revolution and solidarity but his predicament was that he could not escape the ‘representative’ grid of Orientalism. To counter the essential categories assigned to the Indians, the nationalists erected cultural identity distinct to the Indian tradition. The ‘new’ cultural identity was a response to the colonial rule therefore, forging a distinct, homogeneous and a collective identity was conditioned by relating the colonizer to the colonized. In other words, the nationalist discourse was to articulate native selfhood and assert a national identity in response to alien rule. Colonialism was not confined to political rule but also took cognisance of indigenous culture. Therefore, for political emancipation it was necessary for the nationalists to critically evaluate colonial idea of history and politics that had distorted national identity. Gandhi’s complicity with Macaulay’s foundation of education is implicit in his counter-discourse on the ancient education system. The ‘rottenness’ of Western education is contrasted with the ethic based ancient school system. He was aware of the autonomy of language for he equates knowledge of English language to slavery. In his Hind Swaraj, Gandhi addresses the Indians in a pedagogic vein: “The common language of India is not English but Hindi. You should therefore, learn it” (88). Gandhi defined language as an essential template for self-identity within the locus of Indian traditional space. Like the Orientalists, his discourse of language was centred on political empowerment. During the colonial period, English became instrumental as a “centralising language” (Ahmed, In Theory 74), which was able to unify India as an administrative unit. Gandhi reworked on the “centralising” tendency of language for India’s solidarity. His “linguistic formula”
(Lelyveld 190) reversed “the colonial form of writing [...] to challenge the claim to culture” (Loomba 92). Thus nationalism, under Gandhi, mapped India in a separate political and cultural terrain, nevertheless, the chasm between ‘us’ and ‘them’ remained governed by Orientalist essences.

The nationalist critique or alternative had its own ideology loaded with native metaphors. Gandhi’s nationalism becomes explicit in such a political ideology. The colonial concept of politics was given an essentialist twist in favour of moral autonomy as against state autonomy. The cyclical narrative of myths replaced Gandhi’s distrust of European linear history. Gandhi’s response to colonialism as such was founded on a constructed ethical self that could break free from “the shackles of history but only to fall into the grand structures of myths” (Kumar and Gupta 413). Gandhi rejects history as written records of the victors comprising the biased versions of the vanquished. His method of recalling the past was through excavating myths that formed an integral part of Indian thought. However, in his battle against Western civilization, Gandhi could not transcend the framework provided by modern civilization. For instance, India as an object of Western history is removed and placed in the essence of tradition and myths. The traditional Indian myths formed an important constituent of Gandhi’s discourse. Harishchandra and Shrvana, the mythological Indian characters who symbolised truth and dharma, were “living realities” for Gandhi. Machines, the end products of the Western materialism, were discarded in favour of the sublime and elevating charkha (M. Gandhi, Autobiography 6). The charkha was endorsed with “new cultural, political, and economic meanings” (Nandy, Traditions 89). It became a redemptive technique and an attempt to rediscover an alternative economic method compatible with Indian ethics. In fact, the demystification of Western polity was to mystify Indian home rule. His cultural symbols of charkha, ashrams, dandi march and fasts epitomised rural India. Gandhi’s intellectual skills resuscitated and reformulated a past that could counter the urbanised and modern Western civilisation.

Gandhi’s critical discourse was premised on his own understanding/knowledge of the Indian culture, although for opposing the colonisers. Gandhi’s epistemological path-breaking treatise, the Hind Swaraj, acknowledged European testimonies only to foster his knowledge of a morally regenerative nation. However, Paranjape believes Gandhi’s
“alternative modernity” not as an antagonism between the East and the West, but negotiations between the “inner” and the “outer” (Pranjape, “Reworlding Homes” 125-6).

The plan of parliamentary swaraj proposed herein (Hind Swaraj) did not rule out an organised government (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 16). The hierarchy was refigured from the pyramid shape to the “oceanic circles”, where the individual was not marginalized, but was also accountable to his society (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 85: 33). Gandhi’s vision of a nation was a decentralised form of government that was to batter, repair, and recast Western form of government. Gandhi’s spiritualization of politics was one such structure that integrated religion and politics. His religious proclivity evoked the Vedantic philosophy, Christianity, Jainism of which all combined to support his doctrine of universal morality. Politics was brought from the sphere of ‘brute force’ to the passive terrain of morality. The massive popular support that Gandhi enjoyed to perpetuate his ideology of self-government, that is, swaraj was due to his religious scaffoldings.

For the Orientalists, knowledge of Indian culture helped them to establish their foothold in India. On the other hand, Gandhi’s moral epistemology fostered self-knowledge that fortifies the mind and the soul to resist passion, lust and materialism embodied by the West. The search for the source of the meanings in the religious scriptures and formatting the religious idioms to convey his own political philosophy was essential to Gandhi’s discourse. Gandhi’s incorporation of Western and traditional metaphors therefore, signifies his Orientalist moorings embedded in his alternative epistemology.

Hegel’s representation of India made religion its loci. His views on Hindu thought were: “In the massively wild religion of the Indians, which is totally devoted to fantasy, they distinguish indeed one thing as ultimate, namely Brahm or Brahma, also called Brahman. This unity is regarded as the Supreme, and the characterization of man is to identify himself with the Brahm” (Cited in D. King 124-5). Correspondingly, Gandhi too refers to the worship of one form, however instead of positing the Indian religion as “wild” and “devoted to fantasy” he interprets the “oneness of all creation” and the creator as integral to ahimsa. “the chief glory of Hinduism” (Iyer, Moral and Political
Writings 2: 62). Considerably, Gandhi’s cultural resistance is permeated by Orientalist essences, though in alternate form.

The Orientalists studied and translated the sacred texts, which was crucial in understanding Indian spirituality. Gandhi’s reading of religious texts departed from the Orientalists norms. His metaphors certainly defined India in metaphysical terms, but instead of classifying India as a mystic and strange land, it labelled India as a holy place “which would cease to be a nationalist India [. . .] when it goes through the process of civilisation in the shape of reproduction on that sacred soil of gun factories and hateful industrialism” (Cited in R. Gandhi, Good Boatman 145). Gandhi’s idiom of renunciation differed from Hindu terminology of sannyās. However, sannyās in traditional sense is renouncement of worldly pleasures. For Gandhi, it meant service for the mankind, but renouncement of “selfishness”. According to Gandhi: “A sannyāsi, therefore to be true to his creed of renunciation, must care for swarāj not for its sake but for the sake of others” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works, 50: 237). Renunciation implied control over senses and abstinence from worldly pursuits. Gandhi’s ashrams, vegetarian diet, and austere living embodied his concept of renunciation. The idea of rebirth and karma were essential to Hindu thought. Gandhi’s ‘Hinduness’ espoused the doctrine of reincarnation. As Gandhi asserted, “I, for one would not call a man a Hindu if he does not believe in reincarnation” (Cited in M. Chatterjee 139).

The religious texts and philosophy remained the basis for understanding Hindu tradition. For the Orientalists, the religiosity inherent in the Sanskrit texts had to be constructed according to Western standards and beliefs. The Orientalists passed on the privileging of the religious texts to the Indian social reformers and the nationalists. As demonstrated in the ‘Introduction’, Aurobindo’s and Vivekananda’s philosophy was premised on the Vedas. Gandhi too drew copiously on the Gita. Nationalism could not deny the textual power associated with the translations of the Vedas, the Gita and the Upanishads. The Indian reformers reinterpreted the sacred texts to restore Indian spirituality in its unsullied form. Gandhi perceived the Gita as a social text that celebrated performance of duty instead of inaction. This meaning of duty/dharma was transported to the field of action—politics. Gandhi’s idea of “the necessity of acting in the world (karma-yoga) is ultimately based on his interpretation of the Bhagavadgītā”
His expression of spiritual freedom was guided by Patanjali’s *Yogasutra*, which listed five virtues mandatory for the attainment of spiritual freedom. However, Gandhi added six more virtues and modified the traditional philosophy (Parel, “Introduction” 16). In continuity with the spiritual tradition of Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi considered Indian civilisation as stagnant and in need of renewal. He juxtaposed the Vedic past with contemporary India. The ancient seers were not ignorant of the technical advancements but they preferred it to manual labour. There was no “life-corroding competition” (M. Gandhi, *Conditions of Swaraj* 35).

Significantly, Gandhi’s negotiation with colonial discourse emerged from European essences of India. Rather, colonialism was instrumental in shaping the nationalist imaginations. However, Gandhi’s alternative discourse reversed Western meanings, which characterised India. The caste system, for instance, was replaced with *varnashram*, independence with *swaraj*, passive resistance with *satyagraha*. According to Gandhi: “Varnashram is not a religion of superiority and inferiority” (M. Gandhi, “Conditions of Swaraj” 871). He further noted: “The four *Varnas* have been compared in the Vedas to the four members of the body” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 59: 65). If James Mill conceives it as a “mistake” to regard “the Hindus to be a people of high civilization”, the Indian governance as despotic and “the division of the people into castes [. . .] a degrading and pernicious system of subordination” (Mill ii: 107, 131), Gandhi reinforces his concept of civilisation embodied in Indian spirituality. The “degrading” caste system is countered as “a man’s calling” that does not “restrict or regulate social intercourse.” In fact, Gandhi’s religious-ethical vocabulary interpreted the division of caste as performance of different function for the common goal of serving humanity. As Gandhi remarked: “All are born to serve God’s creation, a Brahman with his knowledge, a Kshatriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability and a Shudra with bodily labour” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 21: 247).

These traditional precepts were inducted from Indian philosophy into the political realm: nevertheless in a novel manner. Despite Gandhi’s insistence on the removal of untouchability, his emphasis on the purification of the caste system within the Brahmanic principles suggests representation of the Other (Untouchable) by the elite. Referring to Brahmanism as an essential contribution to Hinduism, Gandhi remarked: “I have not a
shadow of a doubt that Hinduism owes all to the great traditions that the Brahmans have left for Hinduism. They have left a legacy for India, for which every Indian, no matter to what varna he might belong, owes a deep depth of gratitude” (Cited in Dirks, Castes of Mind 233). Akin to this mode of representation was Orientalism that tried to articulate the Indian mindset in order to legitimate the Orientalists textual discoveries. Gandhi’s social reform is hence dressed up in an elitist discourse that undoubtedly includes the marginalized, yet could not abandon the institution of caste as the defining principle of Indian (Hindu) civilisation. Caste had hindered national unification, hence it condemnation was necessary for the anticolonial drive against the British. Therefore, Gandhi’s politics of inclusion (the depressed class inclusion in the Hindu mainstream) took up the cause of the Untouchables to posit his imagined India as an indivisible Hindu family. As he insisted.

My intimate acquaintance with every shade of untouchability convinces me that their lives, such as they are, are so intimately mixed with those of the caste Hindus in whose midst and for whom they live, that it is impossible to separate them. They are part of an indivisible family.” (Cited in Hubel, Whose India 152)

For Gandhi, the Untouchables were Harijans—children of God (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 51: 143). The christening of the lower-class by Gandhi, who himself was non-untouchable, reflects the “construction of untouchability” (Dirks, Castes of Mind 147). Caste had been a cultural fulcrum, which decided the ‘authenticity’ of Indian traditions and a distinct Indian identity. Western sociologist, Max Weber, characterised the caste system as “rational”. In developing an account of Indian social system, caste was assumed as a key concern (Cited in D. Smith 79). The Orientalists had based their narratives on Brahmanical scriptures and the Sanskrit texts. The Indologists combined their interpretations with the Brahmanical documentation of Indian culture. Thus carrying the Brahmanical legacy of a “timeless and spaceless” Indian civilisation, the Orientalists fed on the “dominant discourse carried by a Brahman elite” (Veer, “Foreign Hand” 26).

Indian nationalism did not originate from European nationalism, since the former was the consequence of resistance with the latter (Paranjape, “Reworlding Homes” 114).
Nevertheless, the 'indigenous' struggle was conditioned by colonial responses and 'discoveries'. In this manner, nationalism was Orientalism-in-reverse because of its simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Orientalists official discourse. The nationalist took upon themselves the reformation of the social institutions, like caste, as a national responsibility and (re)defined Indian traditions for “the restoration of [. . .] selfhood and dignity” (126). Western endorsed stereotypes of India, subsequently became a benchmark for the national struggle. The Untouchables were to be integrated with the caste Hindu. Despite germinating national solidarity and mass mobilisation, this integration resulted in sanskritization, that is, the Brahmanical values become the standard for a ‘pristine’ tradition to be followed by Other castes (Dirks, Castes of Mind 251). Gandhi’s thoughts of reforming the lower-strata were within the ambit of sanskritized ideology. In demanding the temple entry for the untouchables, (Wolpert, Gandhi’s Passion 169-70) Gandhi, paradoxically, homogenised Hindu community. The Untouchables were prohibited from eating carrion and were taught to maintain cleanliness, however the satyagraha was the sole concern of the upper-caste. Interestingly, in promoting such strictures, reserved for the Untouchables, Gandhi popularised the notion of their ‘impurity’, which could be reformed by following the injunctions acceptable to caste Hindu (Hubel, Whose India 153, 156). The upliftment of the Untouchables was endowed with Brahmanical ideals of penance, which the Hindus had to undergo for the elimination of Untouchability (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 25:479). As guardians of Indian tradition, the nationalists equated reformation of civilisation to the Brahmanical and Orientalists standards. In other words, the nationalists sustained the myths propounded by the Brahmanical texts and Orientalists discourses.

Hind Swaraj in English translation was Indian Home Rule. Home has been associated with women’s site—household (Zutshi 102). Therefore, home symbolised an “embryonic nation” (T. Sarkar 43) that is, a nation in the incipient stages of its formation, in which women were political subjects, untouched by Western influence. Women were held to be an epitome of purity, self-sacrifice and thoroughly devoted to religion. All these together made her superior to men. In this reference, Gandhi emphasised: “We know that she is any day superior to man in her religious devotion. Silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex” (M. Gandhi, “Our Fallen Sisters” 755). Gandhi’s feminisation of politics visualised a nation where “woman is discursively
marshalled into the political and cultural contest between the colonizer and the colonized” (Mondal 93). As an archetype of purity and suffering, women were encouraged to participate in non-violent protestations. Thereby resistance was feminised in which women became subjects of “nationalist domesticity” (L. Gandhi “Concerning Violence” 112). Throughout the nationalist struggle for freedom, women were considered passive. She became an agenda of nationalist reformulations since it was supposed that women represented Indian traditions—a domain considered to be unchangeable and resistant to world/material persuasions (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee 120). The corollary of Gandhi’s ‘experiments’ on Brahmacharya was that it should only be for procreative means. This meant that women were transfixed as mother. In fact, the essence of woman as mother runs deep down in the Indian tradition. The Indian spiritualists, whom I have analysed in the previous chapter, also restored the image of women as either shakti—the divine mother or highly spiritualised beings who participated in Vedic rituals. Indeed women, as an index to Indian civilisation, were mapped for the antithesis between Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism.

The Gandhian philosophy was focussed on satya. The satyagraha movement was recognised as “the force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence” (M. Gandhi, Collected Works 29: 92). Interestingly, Max Müller, collected information about Hindus from his predecessors and various religious literatures. This helped in the characterisation of Hindus as truth seekers, who had reverence for satya (Müller 58). The parallelism between Müller and Gandhi’s usage of truth, which defined Hindu character, underscores the nationalist predicament that had to rely on textual standards, enshrined in the ancient scriptures, set up by the Orientalists. Certainly, Gandhi to some extent managed to subvert the colonial structures, but failed to transcend the representational framework established by Europeans. He “fancied himself as (one) [. . .] who had accurately diagnosed India’s disease and knew how to [. . .] build up its strength” (Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy 63). The nationalists tailored the traditions, history and culture to scoff at imperialism. It was a way of entering discourses or providing alternative narrative discourses on equal substrata. According to the nationalists, the changelessness of the past was the footing, a self-critical idiom by which India could reclaim its self-esteem and regenerate its inner strength.
While very much an ‘indigenous’ thinker, Gandhi both imbibed and influenced Western thought and practice. The India of his imagination appeared as a “space of ceaseless cultural mixings” (Khilnani, Idea of India 169). Gandhi’s polemical epistemology was a pastiche of different religious readings. He confessed that it was the Sermon on Mount and not the shastras that influenced his theory of non-violence. Gandhi had the capacity to find a cultural poise that allowed him to accept the presence of biculturalism. This is evident in his idioms that transcended the cultural block between Britian and India. Gandhi acknowledged the influence of Western philosophy but he also espoused indigenous narratives explicit in his political theory. This illustrates the inconsistency in Gandhi’s political discourse. He attempted to dissolve the Self and the Other polarity through assimilation of the East and the West. However, he asserted: “In the domain of politics I should make use of indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours” (Cited in Bondurant 106-7). The representation of India defined by essences—traditionality, spirituality, femininity, and nationality—in his vocabulary became a site of contest. Gandhi ‘discovered’ India’s marked feature of assimilation. As he remarked: “The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation; they merge in it […] India has ever been such country” (M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 45). The reductionist approach towards India was buttressed by the political idioms modulated for ‘indigenous’ consumption. The otherworldly was replaced by spiritual, passivity substituted with ahimsa and the village republics in place of a centralized government were all to fashion India in a traditional image.