Chapter 4

Nehru’s Autobiography: Paradox of Language and Identity

With cultural change as its backdrop, the personal narrative in Nehru’s Autobiography is characteristic of a genre that developed in the early nineteenth-century Europe (Drabble 53). Indeed a slightly different flavour is given to the autobiographical genre when a historical event is infused with personal experiences and reflections. In fact, personal treatises of the nineteenth-century, with variegated assessment of India’s past, were by-products of a colonial cultural encounter. Although nationalist writings were saturated with Orientalist versions of India as ageless since the “dawn of history” (Nehru, Autobiography 429), the underlying intention was a joint action promoted against a common enemy.

The Autobiography, as a self-revealing genre, is closely oriented to the romantic elements of self-expression through the means of quest for self-identity. Nehru’s Autobiography “became increasingly valued not so much as an empirical record of historical events but as providing an epitome of personal sensibility among the intricate vicissitudes of cultural change” (Drabbel 53). Besides reviewing the political struggle for independence, the Autobiography provides a psychological insight of a nationalist who came to understand India “via the West” (Nehru, Discovery 50).

Interestingly, Gandhi’s and Nehru’s autobiographies seek to define self-identity in terms of a nation. The quest for personal salvation and, by extension, the discovery of India’s ‘spirit’ is a recurring leitmotif in nationalist imaginations. The theme of spiritual salvation, through the metaphor of peregrination into India’s past, runs persistently through the three main texts of Nehru —Glimpses of World History, An Autobiography and The Discovery of India. The Autobiography is a distressing record of Nehru’s political and personal vicissitudes of life. Nationalism is premised on a collective ideology. Therefore, any external threat to a nation implies self-humiliation and loss of pride. As a national literature, its focus is not on the narrator’s likes and dislikes but knits his personal life with the freedom struggle. In this manner, self-exploration becomes at once a quest for swaraj. This strengthens nationalism as an imagined space, where a
nation and an individual are supposed to be a unified entity. Notably, Nehru covers his childhood memories in almost sixteen pages; a few more pages on his education abroad and a large section devoted to the national movement.

Unlike the *Discovery*, Nehru’s *Autobiography* does not revisit history, but traces the mental thoughts that compelled him to vaguely locate his identity between the East and the West. Surprising, as it may seem, Nehru took a meditative voyage in search for his identity when the colonial culture seemed to threaten his ‘Indianness’. Orientalism marshalled evidence to bracket India within the paradigm of a ‘textual’ nation. Many nationalists subscribed to the European textual-version of India. However, with the rise of colonialism, the nationalists reworked on the stereotypes produced, so as to proclaim a ‘de-contaminated’ India. Interestingly, the reformulations ensnared the natives in Western archives, which fixed India within the parameters of traditions. The idea of ‘discovering’ India did not come up until the British invasion. Hence, nationalism was a response to colonialism. The travel-writings, European history and ethnology stimulated the colonisers in establishing their ownership of India. Apparently, the underlying emphasis was textual possession and hence appropriation of India. Moreover, colonial management was possible through the knowledge of culture, tradition and history (Said, *Orientalism* 36). On the other hand, nationalist writings too had the subject matter of acquiring India, while opposing European ownership. In stating that India clung to him despite his Anglicised background, Nehru attempted to define his ‘Indianness’ (*Nehru, Autobiography* 596).

Before the *Autobiography*, Nehru articulates his acute sense of history in *Glimpses of World History*. Like the romantic poet Keats, he completely submerges himself in an imaginative world (of history) only to find the reality of stark world. The *Autobiography* is a personal document in which Nehru’s quest for identity progresses in tandem with political changes in pre-independent India. The quest for identity has incessantly been a theme in Nehru’s writings. In the *Discovery* and the *Glimpses*, he undertakes a survey of Indian history, reviews the past, and seeks to weave antiquity with modernity. Nehru’s search for identity continues to visualise history as a living reality. Although both the *Discovery* and the *Glimpses* are based on a vivid account of
Indian history, the Autobiography offers a voyage through the “past events [. . .] with which (Nehru) had been connected” (Nehru, Autobiography xv).

In the Autobiography, I will trace the “indissoluble connection between religion and national sentiment” and thereby speculate on the ideological continuities in nationalist constructions and colonial imaginations (Hart 59). The Indian social reformers attempted to reconstruct an ‘Indian’ identity that had been jeopardised during colonialism. The nationalists advocated restoration of a common Indian cultural tradition which was essentially in opposition to that of the West. They believed that the revival of cultural symbols could counter the Orientalist images of India. For instance, Tilak used Shivaji festival to address the masses. Spiritualists like Aurobindo equated Kali, the Goddess, to *shakti* or the divine power of women/tradition. Religion and nationalism have often been connected in some way or the other. In order to appeal to the collective self, religion, kinship and common language are employed as unifying principles. Nationalism, which is not innocent of political manoeuvres, deploys these tools of collective consciousness. The symbols and imagery inspire a willingness to sacrifice life for one’s country. The signifier—religion—varies in connotation, yet remains the core of tradition. The personification of India as *Bharat Mata* not only feminises and essentialises nationalist imaginations, but also defines India in a sublime language. This deification blurs the distinction between religion and nation and therefore inspires the same sentiments and emotions that a religious phenomenon would arouse. ‘Mother’ becomes an archetype in nationalist imaginations. Thus, evincing the link between a nation and its subjects in terms of a mother-child relation, an emotional and devotional bondage is formulated. Nonetheless, allusion to the mother-symbol for a nation restricts women as the “terrain of nationalism” and the preservers of traditions (Zutshi 102). The reference to the status of women has been the benchmark of Indian civilisation. James Mill, for instance, suggested the degraded condition of women which was extended to the ‘inferior’ position of Indian civilisation. He postulated that Indian women are “held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred books, deprived of education” (Cited in Chakravarti 35). The fixation with the status of women continues in the nationalist narratives.
Nehru’s poetic imagination conceives India as “Bharatmata” who, despite the squalor and degradation, had clung to her accumulated wisdom that had been inscribed in the Upanishads since the “dawn of history” (Nehru, Autobiography 429). Interestingly, Nehru’s play of imagination constructs history as a living process and the Upanishads as the marker of Indian history. Indeed, Nehru denounces religion as the driving force of nationalism; he nevertheless establishes nationalism as a form of religion. The use of “glimpse of soul”, “soul of India” (254), “spirit of India” and citing a passage from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad clearly marks the religious content of nationalism (429). Unlike Gandhi, Nehru could never explicitly articulate his religious sentiments. An illustration for this argument is the Kumbh mela event at Allahabad (121-2). Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had offered a satyagraha against the British authorities who had prevented him from taking a dip at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Saraswati. Without much interest in acquiring “merit by bathing in the river,” Nehru participated in the mass movement (121). However, he did take a dip in the Ganges to overcome his fatigue and again repeated this act with the satyagrahis.

Nehru, to a considerable extent, resolves his inner contradictions in the Discovery when he seeks refuge in Indian spirituality recorded in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Religious vocabulary was a deciding factor in Gandhi’s growth as a popular leader. Like Gandhi, Nehru too wishes to identify with the masses and establish communion with the common people as a symbol of identity. However, his elite self often intervenes and contributes to his “querc mixture of the East and West” (596). Nehru’s Western education distances him from the masses and places him on a “separate mental perch” (77).

The narrative in the Autobiography entwines personal and impersonal history. Historical narrative, whether in recounting India’s past or political development, evokes a sense of community and fraternity. During a no-tax campaign, Nehru’s house, Anand Bhawan, was to be confiscated by the British Government. Nehru records this incident not only as a personal loss, but also the pulling down of the National flag as “submission of the spirit” (333). Nehru presents the impersonal impressions in such a manner so as to give them a personal tinge, thereby liquidating the difference between personal/self and public/political emancipation. Consequently, Nehru’s personal chronicle was “an act of
self-promotion, a calling-card solicitously slipped through the letter-box of history” (Khilnani, “Gandhi and Nehru” 152).

As a student in Cambridge, he was many times fined for not speaking at his college debate society. The Autobiography records Nehru’s metamorphosis from a student in Harrow and Cambridge to an active participant in the political movement of India. Nehru himself does not state his magnetic appeal towards the multitude, but his amazement at the large gatherings of the peasants, to listen to his speeches, evidently conveys his transformation. Therefore, in describing his mental growth, Nehru defines the changed “face of India”, in which, the peasants play a pivotal role (Nehru, Autobiography 203).

As already stated in the previous chapters, the social reformers had a proclivity to first highlight India’s depravity, and subsequently espouse methods for reformation. Nehru’s picture of a free India is riveted on reformation of socio-economic conditions for he explains economic, recession as the cause of India’s exploitation and moral degeneration. Therefore, his nationalist discourse was obliged to reverse the rigid social structures and replace the ‘degenerate’ Indian society with Western ideals of democracy and socialism. The basis of India’s decay and exploitation was not its ‘inferior’ culture or moral degeneration, as some of the earlier nationalists emphasised, but the economic depravity. Even communalism was the consequence of economic aspect. Regarding communal politics, Nehru wrote:

> It was a struggle for jobs for the middle-class intelligentsia. There were obviously not enough jobs to go round, and so the Hindu and Muslim communalists quarrelled about them... The conflict between the two was therefore often economic, but it was always given a communal colouring. (Nehru, Autobiography 466-7)

A brief examination of Nehru’s family background and his upbringing would assist my assertion of his patrician inheritance, and his elitist political philosophy modelled on European lines of modernity. Nehru’s privileged and comfortable childhood forms an essential part of my chapter on his Autobiography. However, Nehru’s exposure to Western academics influenced his image of India. Therefore, I shall analyse Nehru’s
parentage, cultural inheritance and educational background, which to a considerable extent provides a blue print for India’s architecture. In fact, the predicament of nationalism is the frequent reference to Western discourses on India in the revival of an ‘authentic’ cultural identity. The rise of the middle-class, which constituted a greater percentage of nationalists, had been closely associated with the colonial institutions: law, universities and other professions. Undoubtedly the nationalists adapted the English language since it was intended to strategically contain opposition. Whether at the hands of the coloniser or the colonised, language was instrumental in internalising and naturalising political discourse. Therefore, I shall also examine Nehru’s use of language in the construction of India and the pivotal role of language in determining national identity.

Nehru acknowledges himself to be a “prig” who was “more an Englishman than an Indian” (Nanda, Jawaharlal Nehru 255). His aristocratic ways of life and Fabian economics fashioned his political trajectory. The Nehrus’ house at Allahabad was located near the European dwellings. In those days when Indians were given subordinate positions and discouraged to prosper in spite of their higher education, the Nehrus’ house had swimming pool, electricity and piped water. Coming from a high status family, Nehru was astonished to see the economic conditions of the have-nots. As a nationalist, he became aware of his “responsibility” to transform the Indian society (Nehru, Autobiography 52). He longed for an industrialised and ‘progressive’ nation. Nehru’s luxuriant and affluent upbringing distanced him from the Hindu orthodox circle. His father, Motilal Nehru was excommunicated for return from Europe to India without undergoing atonement rituals. These unorthodox beliefs effected Nehru’s analysis of Indian nationalism and its reconstruction. He had to assure the Indians that the modernisation he dreamt about was not an imitation of the West but an appropriation of the best values of the past with a tinge of Western ideals.

Nehru was the only son of prosperous parents. His grandfather and great grandfather were Koirwal and Vakil respectively. Nehru’s father enjoyed the company of European friends and was attracted to their Westernised ways. Later, with the ascendency of nationalist movement and the coming of Gandhi, Motilal Nehru gave up his career and entered active politics. The cultural ambience of the Nehru family was a
mixture of the West and the East. Besides Sanskrit and Hindi, Nehru was taught Latin at home. Nehru’s knowledge of religion, before his participation in the national struggle, was limited to tales from Hindu folklore and mythologies, Hindu customs, festivals and sacred texts. Gradually, for Nehru religion became intrinsic to the search for identity.

The language of nationalism was moulded from Gandhi’s ethical terminology to frame a secular, democratic and social nation. Gandhi had ‘dissected’ India’s soul and diagnosed the absence of spirituality as the cause for India’s defeat. In stark contrast to Gandhi’s Autobiography, Nehru’s Autobiography does not belong to the genre of confession. Gandhi, as a moralist, confessed his ‘impure’ sexual instincts. When Gandhi plunged into the independence movement, self-control was employed as an essential part of his political philosophy. Nehru attempted to enter the “sub-conscious wisdom of an ancient race” (Nehru, Discovery, 152) which despite numerous invasions sustained Indian culture. Nehru advocated modernity as a necessary ingredient to thrust India to the international arena. While the Renaissance, the Reformation and various other modern movements had occurred in Europe, India was struggling for its independence. Moreover, British colonialism had denuded India of its economic and political structures.

Considerably, Nehru’s nationalist imagination is predominantly the result of his voracious reading of European literature. Notably, Nehru’s education abroad had fostered ideas of liberty and nationalism. In his Autobiography, Nehru draws upon G.B. Shaw’s concept of nationalism: “A conquered nation is like a man with cancer [. . .]. Conquered nations lose their place in the world’s march because they can do nothing but strive to get rid of their nationalists movements by recovering their national liberty” (383). In writing the Autobiography, Nehru attempts to find an anchor for his vagrant mind. Completely absorbed in Western culture, Nehru feels detached from the Indian masses. On introspection, he finds himself as a “mixed-up being yearning for roots and struggling to work out his own destiny” (Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru 197). Interestingly, the discussions in Cambridge on Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater appeals to his Western mind, but his ‘Indian’ self cannot comprehend the metaphysics of the Upanishads and the Gita (Nehru, Autobiography 15). Nehru’s Western outlook cannot
understand India without comparing it to Italy. As he puts it, “in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together” (19).

Keeping in mind Nehru’s elite background, I will examine the paradox of identity that had split Nehru’s personality. Nehru does not associate himself completely with India. Regarding this he writes:

I have become a queer mixture of East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. [. . .] I cannot get rid of [. . .] past inheritance or my recent acquisitions. They are both part of me and [. . .] also create a feeling of spiritual loneliness. I am a stranger [. . .] in the West [. . .]. But in my own country [. . .] I have an exile’s feeling. (596)

Paradoxically, Western notions of freedom and liberty fashioned anti-colonial rebellion. Being exposed to Western culture and education, Nehru aspires to modernise India, but Gandhi’s presence fragments his political ideology. Gandhi’s metaphysical doctrine of swaraj, accentuate India’s spirituality in contrast to Western materialism. Nehru considers Gandhi’s impact on the masses, due to his religious idioms, essential for fostering a national unity. He is aware of the tremendous religious faith of the masses, which he wanted to divert towards political and economic action. For Nehru, the national struggle was a saga of agony and mental conflict. It necessitated people to assert their identity and thereby coalesced an individual with the nation. In other words, during the freedom struggle, individuality could make sense when seen as a part of the national struggle. This combination of self and nation resonates in Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj and Nehru’s Discovery, which too visualised the integrity of Nehru’s imagined India as a victim of economic inequality. Unlike Gandhi, who dealt with the human body as a storehouse of self-restraint for the purification of the soul, Nehru conceived the improvement as pertinent to the development of inner consciousness.

Nevertheless, Nehru seeks to comfort his internal cravings by questioning and self-criticism. He expresses his astonishment at the ignorance of Britishers about India. Though they had conquered India, yet they “did not know her or try to know her. They never looked into her eyes” (429). Nehru himself felt alienated since he was unable to
“enter into the spirit and ways of thinking” (374) of his countrymen, though he embarked on a voyage to fathom India’s spirit and “gazed at the millions of friendly eyes [. . .] and tried to understand what lay behind them” (602). Furthermore, Nehru confessed his ambivalent status due to his Western “thoughts and approach” side-by-side with the existence of India’s past inheritance. Nehru’s reiteration of his ruptured Indian identity is understandable as his elite background circumscribed him. Interestingly, his endeavour to ‘know’ India and contest British knowledge of India in the coloniser’s tongue was a “parodic mimicry” that challenged the colonial representation of India’s culture (Teltscher 148). This “reversed scramble for cultural primacy” favoured antagonisms and binary oppositions (L. Gandhi, Postcolonial 147). Nehru drew upon India’s past and vitality. He was particular about the “home-grown” or indigenous culture. Regarding this, he stated: “True culture derives its inspirations from every corner of the world but it is home-grown and has to be based on the wide mass of the people” (Nehru, Discovery 564). Obviously, Nehru realised that India was a “melting pot” of diverse cultures, yet native discourse decided the ‘authenticity’ of Indian culture (58). Nehru himself was not sure about his ‘Indianness’. For he felt estranged and “at home nowhere” (Nehru, Autobiography 596). Home, in the Indian context, signifies domesticity, patriarchy and tradition. Interestingly, in both the nationalists under study, the imagery of home was frequent.

Western education enabled the Indians to think about their own society. With the advent of British, came railways, telegraphic cables, printing press and many other technologies. Press facilitated the dissemination of knowledge and fostered political awareness among the Indians. Hence began the journey for the search for self-identity, the engagement with the problem of regeneration of the ‘lost’ glory of the Indian past. Indeed, native intellectuals often internalised the Orientalist discourse in relating themselves to the colonisers. The acceptance of Western thought in the assertion of national identity, almost obsessed the minds of these nationalists.

Curiously, the Indians were familiarized with their own culture and history through the English language. The Orientalist stereotypes conveyed through the English language had an impact on the natives. Though nationalism resisted the colonial typecasts, yet the symbolic power of the colonial discourse/language survived in the
works of the nationalists. The complexity of indigenising English during the colonial period became more pronounced while constructing a nation. Nehru had access to Western education, culture and models of nationalism; his youthful days spent amongst the Western academia and learning Sanskrit and Persian cultivated a hybrid man. He confessed that his education was “mongrel” (28). Significantly, the presence of non-translated indigenous words along with a pedantic style of writing English in the Autobiography, shows the ambivalence in taming English for asserting ‘authentic’ Indian identity or adopting “a Calibanistic model of revolt which is dependent upon the coloniser’s gift of language/ideas” (Loomba 189).

Language as a medium of communication transmits experiences and contributes to the growth of culture. Therefore, “language as culture” is the consequence of “collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (Thiongo 15). Nehru goes down the memory lane, sketches the stages of his physical and mental growth, differences with his contemporaries and plays on “historical urges” that encourage people to be active participants in the national movement (Nehru, Autobiography 282). In fact, history is imagined as a living phenomenon in which nationalism marches with history (283). History, therefore, is astutely articulated to produce a sense of collective memory. Indeed, through historical imagination it is possible to ‘speak’ for a nation.

Nehru consciously employs phrases with which his countrymen can recognise these expressions as a part of community language. The expressions and rhetoric like, “big family,” “Hindu Muslaman ki Jai,” “we feel as Asiatics a common bond uniting us against the aggression of Europe” imagines an ‘Indian’ audience that shares Nehru’s nationalist aspirations (429, 160, 470-1). Moreover, the stress on Hindi as a language that addressed the “emotional energy of the mass” spawns the idea of oneness and the struggle against a common adversary, the British (456). At certain places there seems to be a deliberate fusion of English and Hindi words as in case of “lathi charges” (213). Nehru seeks to define his Indian sensibility in preserving traditional terms and also not “damaging those words [. . .] that have meaning only in the native tongue” (Sethi 50). In this context, Nehru’s technique of familiarising a ‘real’ India is evident in a cursory mention of Indian festivals (Nehru, Autobiography 8-9).
The Autobiography abounds in poetic expressions of romantic aestheticism, sensuous and imaginative imagery. Undoubtedly it is an outcome of the influence of English literature and culture. In the Autobiography, Nehru describes the Himalayas as the “wisdom of past ages, mighty sentinels” (569). Thereby he renders the oldest physical terrain as imaginative history. The Himalayas, according to Hindu mythology, are abodes of Gods/Goddesses. Hence, the ancient ascetics wandered in the Himalayas for salvation. Perhaps to a certain extent, Nehru evokes Hindu myths in picturing the Himalayas as the “wisdom of past ages.” Nehru survived both the World Wars that had an immense impact on his literary productions. Besides a romantic tenor, Nehru’s poetic prose had the effect of modern poetry that deals with present decay and barrenness. Ordinary things could activate his mind’s imaginative faculty. For instance, the comparison of noise produced by hailstorm with an artillery bombardment. As Nehru recalled his gaol days he wrote: “Occasionally there would be a hailstorm, with hailstorm bigger than marbles coming down on the corrugated iron roofs and making a tremendous noise, something like an artillery bombardment” (355). The passage conveyed gloominess over the spiritual loss of India with the growth of science. The mention of T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Hollow Men’ reinforced the assertion that Nehru was dismayed with the loss of values and faith.

The cited works of English poets like Byron, William Blake, Matthew Arnold, G. M. Hopkins, Oscar Wilde and T. S. Eliot, add to the Autobiography’s literary achievement. A selective borrowing of the lines from a Victorian poet portrays Nehru’s wavering mind. Nehru was keen to dress India in the “garb of modernity” (50), but reflects his predicament in Arnold’s words as: “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, /The other powerless to be born, / With nowhere yet to rest his head” (374). The Victorian poet, Arnold, was a pessimist who strove to find an anchor after loss in faith and spiritual values since the arrival of science. The Victorian age witnessed a clash between religion and science. Scientific discoveries shook the spiritual assertion of man’s creation. Doubt, spiritual conflict and agnosticism were the consequences of collision between science and religion (Annan, “Science” 109). Trapped in Western moorings, Nehru tried to resist the metaphysical and religious definition of India that had characterised it in sublime terms. Torn between the world of religion and science, Nehru revealed his duality of self. Science was the language of the West and India was
configured as a land of religious beliefs and practices. Heavily influenced by his Harrow and Cambridge background, it was not possible for Nehru to use spiritual idioms. To Nehru, religion was a cause of personal crisis. It alienated him from his cultural roots and his countrymen. Paradoxically, Nehru explored anti-imperial sentiments by using the language of a dominant culture. Significantly, the style is “Western, yet informed by a profoundly Indian sensibility” (R. King 151).

Despite Nehru’s affinity towards English literature, his ‘Indianness’ fashions language as a “formidable weapon with which to challenge the British” (Khilnani, “Gandhi and Nehru” 156). Language as a cultural artefact is intrinsic to nationalism and colonialism. In the postcolonial scenario, English is accepted as an Indian language. It is easily assimilated into the Indian social fabric (Ahmed, In Theory 77). An Indian writer in English, Raja Rao, articulates the impossibility of writing as an ‘Indian’. Raja Rao resolves the tension between use of indigenous and English language. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between Nehru’s reworking on language as a cultural artefact and Raja Rao’s bilingualism, whereby Rao, in his foreword to Kanthapura, conveys English as “the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual [. . .] . We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians.” Certainly, Nehru does not dress up the English language with localism or native idioms as Rao, but an unconscious corruption of the language does occur. Nehru understood the symbolic power of language and its ability to penetrate the matrix of culture. He wrote:

The literature, culture and political condition of any country are closely knit. It was perhaps the English poet Milton who had written somewhere that if shown the language of any country, without knowing anything else about it, he could tell the type of country it was, free or subject, civilized or uncivilized, stronger, weak, brave or timid.” (Gopal, Selected Works 443)

The African writer, Chinua Achebe posits that the role of the English language was “to carry the weight of [. . .] African experience.” Accordingly, the language had to be “a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suits its new African surroundings.” Nehru’s Autobiography is a defiance of colonial rule in a colonial
language, punctuated with nationalist idioms unknown to the Western audience and “in full communion with its ancestral home” (Achebe 434). For instance, Gandhi is addressed as ‘Gandhiji’ instead of its English equivalent, ‘Mr.’ According to Nehru, etymologically ‘ji’ is a derivative of Sanskrit Arya (Nehru, Autobiography 30-1). In spite of his anti-colonial stance, Nehru did not contest the use of English in the administrative function. His bilingualism could not eschew the necessity of English as a link in the international arena. Nehru posited a linguistic formula of incorporating English into Indian languages, where the national language was privileged as “belonging to that inner domain of cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out” (Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee 7).

The English language in India entrenched the British rule and worked as a colonial arsenal in circulating the myth of Western superiority. English education was tailored to serve the needs of the coloniser and finally produce “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay 729). In fact, the Autobiography as a nationalist treatise reorients the English language as a tool of decolonisation. The nativisation of a colonial language for opposing the European discourse considerably foregrounds the dilemma of nationalism. Significantly, Gandhi too got entangled in the choice of language. In this context he wrote:

I cannot discontinue the English Harijan [. . .] . My contact with the West is also widening. I was never opposed to the British or to any Western nor am I today [. . .] . So English will never be excluded from my store of knowledge. I do not want to forget that language nor give it up. (However), it cannot become our national language. (Cited, in Khilnani, “Gandhi and Nehru” 154)

Language “constructs the objects of reality” (Young, Postcolonialism 388). Nehru was aware of language and literature as the mediators of ‘reality’ as long as they were “connected with the lives of [. . .] masses.” In a similar vein Nehru wrote, “I have no doubt whatever that Hindustani is going to be the common language of India.” In spite of that, he acknowledged, “English will become increasingly a language used for technical, scientific [. . .] and especially for international contacts.” Therefore, he yearned for a
language that could “adapt and assimilate many words from English” (Nehru, *Autobiography* 454-6). Nehru apprehends the complexity inherent in “infusing native spirit into an alien language” (Sethi 50).

The political disciple of Gandhi, Nehru was impressed by Gandhi’s recognition with the Indian peasants. Since India was fundamentally a “peasant India”, Nehru’s syllogism conferred Gandhi as representative of India (Nehru, *Autobiography* 253). Gandhi’s presence as a foil to Nehru in the *Autobiography* was perhaps to charter India as an embodiment of non-violence, spiritualism and toleration, all that Gandhi defined in his religious idioms. In fact, Gandhi’s presence symbolised the ‘changeless’ and cultural continuity of India. Both Gandhi and the India which he epitomised, were enigmatic for Nehru. Despite his Indian nationality, India was a strange country for Nehru (373). He was an “outsider” who could not internalise “all his thought and action in the Indian experience” (Gopal, “Formative Ideology” 787). Gandhi’s eclectic borrowings did not turn Gandhi into “an alien critic” (Nehru, *Discovery* 50), in so far his critique of tradition was located within the ambit of Indian culture. In other words, Gandhi selectively absorbed Western culture and transformed it to suit Indian perceptions. In contrast to Gandhi, Nehru could not fashion a religious vocabulary. Thus, in his construction of India Nehru moulded and tampered with certain Western thoughts.

Akin to the Orientalists, Nehru also fixed India within the co-ordinate of a village. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, it signified ‘uncorrupted’ ‘real’ India. Despite many differences between the Orientalist and the nationalist ideology of a village as a microcosm of India, the village persistently remained the core of Indian traditions. As architects of modern India, Gandhi and Nehru considered villages as cultural sites, which governed Indian mindset and beliefs. For Gandhi, villages gave the impression of Indians as organised people who had “been familiar with representative institutions almost from the time immemorial” (M. Gandhi, *Collected Works* 1: 93). It was to reclaim the self-esteem that had been injured when the colonisers asserted Indian polity as despotic (Mill ii: 131).

Almost in a manner strikingly similar to Gandhi, Nehru invoked the idea of village India. The connotation of village India varied. With Gandhi “the village was a site of authenticity, for Nehru it was a site of backwardness” (Jodhka 3343). Nehru
deplored the stagnant and poverty stricken village communities. Conceding with the Orientalists, he imagined that “India is in the main the peasant and the worker, not beautiful to look at, for poverty is not beautiful” (Nehru, *Autobiography* 431). Whatever may be the limitations of village communities, Nehru recognised them as the foundation of Indian social structure that could “create a common national bond” (Nehru, *Discovery* 251). In agreement with the Orientalists, Nehru characterised the peasant class as passive, which had an “amazing capacity to bear [. . .] famine, flood, disease, and continuous grinding poverty”(Nehru, *Autobiography* 306). Nehru espoused the refurbishment of the “face of India” (203, 406) through the ‘discovery’ of India. This ‘authentic’ India was to be found in the villages—the uncorrupted terrain. The village is a social category highlighted, imagined and constructed by the Orientalists and the nationalists either as the core of Indian tradition or an autonomous unit of administration. Though Indian villages were classified as autonomous by the colonisers, they continued to be celebrated as the hallmark of Indian civilisation by the nationalists and the Orientalists alike, for different reasons.

The status of a microcosm of India was bestowed upon the villages. So firm was the root of this ideology that the search for self-identity required a sense of recognition with the peasants. Although Nehru participated in agrarian upheavals and addressed the rural folks, he could not think of himself to be a part of them. This aggravated his sense of alienation and “spiritual loneliness” (596). When Nehru joined the national struggle, his bourgeois outlook witnessed “a new picture of India [. . .] naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable.” Such a disgusting picture of India instilled in Nehru a “new responsibility” towards the deplorable condition of the masses (52). Not only that, he refers to India as “peasant India” thereby maintaining the eternal nature of village India (253).

Though Nehru’s *Autobiography*, as a nationalist canon, is limited to the literate readers; the common folk are included as agents of suffering. This enables the narrator to form a larger audience for national integration. The illiterate sections thus become an object of reformation; as such, their inclusion conveniently gives the illusion of mass participation. This narrative for recognising the degeneracy in India is punctuated with an imaginative reconstruction of its past glory, more explicitly in the *Discovery*. 
Nehru’s political philosophy seems to be fractured by his elite background and his concern for preserving the ideals of Indian traditions. Nationalism, as a ‘site’ of opposition towards the Western concept of modernity, was reformulated according to Indian tradition. Nevertheless, the desire to implant modernity on tradition produced an ambivalent discourse. A “critical modernist”, Nehru, advocated a Western model of progress as a catalyst for India’s regeneration (Parekh, Colonialism 35). Nevertheless, it was programmed to take full account of India’s traditions, that is, Western modernisation had to pass through the sieve of Indian traditions. Further, in stressing the difference between the European and Indian conditions, Nehru envisaged a social nation that “will have to grow out of Indian conditions” (Nehru, Autobiography 589). Nehru’s mapping of India was shaped by his family’s urbane outlook, which subsequently was refined by his Western education. No matter how hard he tried “to shed the plumage of the Western style” his perceptions remained Western (Oberoi 60).
Notes

1 The Autobiography was initially entitled In and Out of Prison: An Autobiographical Narrative with Musings on Recent Events in India. See C. D. Narasimhaiah, Jawaharlal Nehru: The Statesman as Writer. 75. Later, Bodley Head, the publishers, changed the title to An Autobiography. Unlike Nehru’s Glimpses of World History, the Autobiography was published in London in April 1935. The Indians and the British equally praised its literary achievement. Even the Government of India did not proscribe it as other nationalist writings had been. Many newspapers and journals commented on it. The Economist wrote: “He himself is in many ways a product of British education—but is opposed to the rule of nation by nation.” See B. R. Nanda, Jawaharlal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman. 286, 6.