

Impact of Orientalism in India

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Introduction:

Edward said evaluation and critique of the set of beliefs known as orientalism forms an important ground for post-colonial studies. It is the long tradition of western scholarship on eastern culture. It is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between “orient” and “occident” It decodes the power relationship between the orient and the occident to analyse how the west manipulates knowledge of and for the orient, and to elaborate how the east is influenced and existed in knowledge.

CONTENT:

The first orientalist were 19th century scholars who translated the writings of the “orient” into English, based on the assumption that a truly effective colonial conquest required knowledge of the conquered peoples. By knowing the orient, the west came to own it. The orient became the studied, the seen, the observed, and the object. Orient is a vast region, one that spreads across a myriad of cultures and countries. It includes most of Asia as well as the Middle East. The discourse and visual imagery of orientalism is laced upon with notions of power and superiority. The feminine and the weak orient await the dominance of the west; it is a defenceless and unintelligent whole that exists for, and in terms of it, its own western counter parts. In this context I consider it

as quote worthy to remand one line of Macchaleuy, “One rack of western shelf is equivalent to all the knowledge of the East”.

Orientalism is western fantasy and is of proxy nature. It is an institutional structure which is to be understood at global and personal level. Oriental discourse, for said, is more valuable as a sign of power exerted by the west over the orient than a ‘true’ discourse about the orient. If we see the philology, lexicography, history, biology, literature, economic, we can find out that all are dominated by Britishers. Above all, Said holds sway over the literary criticism of the 19th century novel. His recent work, “culture and imperialism”(1993) is a critique of not only of those authors like Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad who wrote about Europe colonies and dependencies, but also of quintessentially domestic writers as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. For eg; In Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, which is awarded Nobel prize, writer personifies the intellect of a small British boy as hundred times better than a Buddhist monk who failed to attain salvation.

Contrapuntal reading makes readers to find out gaps in great Victorian novels. Female writers like Jane Eyre, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf deliberately subscribed themselves to the Imperialistic views of British Empire. For eg; Jane Austen’s “*Man’s field park*.” E.M. Fosters’ “*Passage to India*.” Even we can question the luxurious life of girls in “*Man’s field park*” “though none of them work for their livelihood. His book makes three major claims: 1) the first is that orientalism, although purporting to be an objective, disinterested and rather esoteric field, in fact functioned to serve political ends. In the late 20th century, it helps preserve American power in the middle East. 2) His second claim is that orientalism helped define Europe’s self-image. In this context, Karl Marx said that, “Orientalism can’t represent themselves, they must be represented

Orientalism led the west to see Islamic culture as static in both time and place, as “eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself “Lastly, Said argues that orientalism has produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture. The depictions of “the Arab” as irrational, menacing, untrustworthy, anti-western, dishonest, and perhaps most importantly prototypical, are ideas into which orientalist scholarship has evolved. These notions are trusted as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by the Occident. Said says that to write

about the Arab oriental world is to write with the authority of a nation, and not with the affirmation of a strident ideology but with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force.

Orientalism as academic discipline is a style of thought corporate institution which served the purpose of reinforcing western representation. Arthur Blfoer declared” we know the civilization of Egypt more than we know any other civilization”Napolean’s political ambition and academic knowledge are important in occupying Egypt.

Said tries to bring the unity between all the subjugate people. In “The world, the text and the critic “said compared life with text and real critic plays crucial role than writer in the contemporary situation. Arnold in his “functions of criticism “says about critic and writer: “critical study is important than creativity”. He points out that impartial criticism is missing in English literature. We are finding that literature is always linked with university principle.

The Germans were prominent orientalists, yet Germany never went on to become an imperial power in any of the oriental countries of North Africa or the Middle East. A line is drawn between two continents; “Europe is powerful and Articulate, Asia is defeated and distant. “One Muslim critic, Sadik Jalal Al Azm, has argued that “kind of religious essentialism of which said indicates orientalism is actually necessary to understand the Muslim mind. Another critic Ijaz Ahmed says “Orientalism is complete flaw issue. Every representation is a misrepresentation”

Said says rejection of orientalism entails a rejection of biological generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices. It is a rejection of greed as a primary motivating factor in intellectual pursuit. Rejection of orientalis thinking doesn’t entail a denial of difference between ‘the west’ and ‘the orient’, but rather an evaluation of such differences in a more critical and objective fashion.

ORIENTALISM AND INDIA:

Although Edward Said concentrated mainly on European Orientalism focusing on Arab Middle East, the Saidian approach to Orientalist discourse is thought to be validly applicable to other parts

of the non-Western world, and various scholars Influenced by Said have expanded his theories to include India [11]. In *Orientalism*

Said himself only occasionally refers to Orient list discourse on India. For example, he mentions William Jones (1746–1794), the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who, according to Said, with his vast knowledge of Oriental peoples was the undisputed founder of scholarly Orientalism. Jones wanted to know India better than anyone in Europe, and his aim was to rule, learn and compare the Orient with the Occident. Said finds it interesting that many of the early Orientalists concentrating on India were jurists like Jones or doctors of medicine with strong involvement with missionary work. Most Orient lists had a kind of dual purpose of improving the quality of life of Indian peoples and advancing arts and knowledge back in the heart of the Empire. (Ibid., 78–79.)

In Sade's view, the fact of the Empire was present in nearly every British nineteenth century writer's work concentrating on India. They all had definite views on race and imperialism. For example, John Stuart Mill claimed liberty and representative government could not be applied to India because Indians were civilization ally – if not racially – inferior. (Ibid. 14.) Said also claims that India was never a threat to Europe like Islamic Orient was. India was more vulnerable to European conquest, and, hence, Indian Orient could be treated with “such proprietary hauteur,” without the same sense of danger affiliated with the Islamic Orient. (Ibid. 75.) Said also describes Romantic Orientalism that sought to regenerate materialistic and mechanistic Europe by Indian culture, religion and spirituality. Biblical themes were used in the project: the death of cold Europe was imagined, its spiritual rebirth and redemption sought after, but India per se was not as significant as the use of India for modern Europe. The Orient lists mastering Oriental languages were seen as spiritual heroes or knight-err ants who were giving back to Europe its lost holy mission.

India's history is territorialized to exclude the so-called outside influence as not essentially Indian factors, or they have been seen as absorbed into the essentially changeless India. In popular culture both in Europe and India, Romantic bridge builders have been trying to connect the West to the East and search for a synthesis that could combine the “European rationality” and “Indian spirituality.” In this view Indians need the more down-to-earth European attitude and practicality whereas the material west should adopt the emotional attitude rising from Indian

spirituality. Interestingly, all representations seem to reinforce the binary ontology between India and Europe. At any case India and the West are highly imagined in the Andersonian sense. However, in the time of crisis of representation, as we can be seen as “prisoners of our discourses,” which makes it difficult to neutrally and objectively evaluate other discourses, it should be emphasized that the imagined India in scientific and popular discourse is not the problem *per se*, but the fact that there seems to be lack of awareness of it. It seems like the significant and urgent quest is not so much to “draw complete and truthful map” of India but to critically research what kinds of ideological and power relations have affected how “we” have represented “them.”

In Indo-Orientalism political power seems to have been tightly intertwined in either colonial or indigenous nationalist representations of India. Moreover, the emancipatory anti-Orientalist approaches have drawn on patronizing political ideology of anti-Orientalist charity, a sort of imported intellectual guerilla tactics trying to paradoxically struggle for the agency of Indian self-representations – on behalf of the Indians. What has been common to most approaches on studying India is the fetishization of otherness, a compulsion to dichotomy between the West and India, whether it be expressed by Westerners or Indians.

IMPACT OF ORIENTALISM IN INDIA

The impact of Orientalism, whether as a policy position or scholarly pursuit on Indian society, was often ambivalent, contradictory and unintended. A significant example being the impact of Orientalist policies on Hindu civil law, which was rendered as an image of European case law. William Jones, who initiated the compilation of the Digest of Hindu Laws, was trained in English case law which was based on precedence and was open to multiple interpretations by judges. However, Jones viewed Indian laws as being eternal and timeless and thus considered any difference of opinions amongst the pundits as arising from venality or ignorance. Thus, his motivation for compiling the Digest was to recover and enshrine the ‘ancient constitution’ of India. While English jurisprudence sought certainty in law by resorting to precedence or the natural law, Hindu jurisprudence sought to resolve conflicting interpretations of the same law on the basis of commentaries or *samhitas*. Colebrooke who completed the Digest believed, wrongly, that the various *samhitas* or commentaries on legal texts were authored by lawyers and thus reflected the actual law of the land. He then divided the various *samhitas* into schools of law, akin to Muslim

personal law, with reference to one particular author who was taken to be the norm for that particular school. Gradually this developed into a curious form of English case law, complete with precedents from which a judge had to select a suitable one. What had started with Warren Hastings's search for the 'ancient Indian constitution' ended up with what he wanted to avoid – English law as the law of India. (Cohn 1996, ch-3)Trautmann (1997) has argued that the Orientalists prepared the way for the emergence of the concept of the Aryan master race and scientific racism in the 20th century. The evolution of racism can be traced back to the discovery of the monogenesis of Latin, Greek and Sanskrit by William Jones. H.H Wilson and Francis Ellis then classified the Indian languages into the Indo European and Dravidian families. Max Mueller, later, synthesized this philological discovery into the Aryan Migration theory, whereby the Aryans (from the Sanskrit term Arya meaning fair skinned and civilized) migrated to India from Central Asia and subjugated the natives. This racial theory provided a pseudo-scientific basis for racism in the late 19th century. In this view, Indians were seen as inherently backward and inferior compared to the superior Western civilization, while at the same time it created an inclusive space whereby Indians and Europeans were related by blood. These theories of race have continued well into the modern times, with political parties such as the DMK (Dravida Munetra Kazhagam) having been formed on the assumptions of an Aryan invasion. Orientalism was instrumental in preparing the background for the 'Bengal Renaissance' of the early 19th century (Kopf 1969). The 'rediscovery' of India's ancient past brought pride in Indian culture and traditions among the educated Indians in Calcutta. In the face of increasing criticism of Indian traditions and religions by Christian Missionaries and colonial officials, intellectuals such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore and others spearheaded a movement for the revitalization of Hindu religion and its modernization from within. Later in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Orientalist knowledge contributed to the emergence of a middle class, proud of its culture, and in the development of a national consciousness in them. Balgangadhar Tilak, V.D Savarkar, K.P Jayaswaland Jawaharlal Nehru all wrote extensively on the 'glorious' ancient Indian past and advocated a return to it by throwing out the English yoke. (Kopf 1969; Dodson 2010) Lastly, though the Orientalist project was undoubtedly motivated by imperial concerns, however one cannot ignore the various contributions of the Orientalists in furthering our knowledge of Indian history

and society. Several branches of systematic studies were founded by these scholars such as numismatics and epigraphy, comparative linguistics and philology.

They were the first to initiate a systematic study of the vernacular languages of India and gave them a concrete shape (with a definite grammar and vocabulary). Various Sanskrit classics such as Kalidasa's *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam* were also recovered from oblivion by scholars such as William Jones. In the last analysis, one can observe that a framework for understanding, orientalism in the Indian context seems flawed in several respects. Orientalism cannot be understood simply as a project of imperial domination, as various strands of acculturation and genuine scholarship and interest in Indian society and culture can be noticed. Also, it was not a static *modus operandi* but a shifting set of policy positions that adapted itself to the varying demands of imperial governance. While in the 18th century the official approach to India was mild, it became aggressive in the 19th century. Further, it was a conscious picking up of existing elements from Indian society to legitimize British power while at the same time it co-opted various sections in Indian society, especially the pundits. Its impact cannot simply be dismissed as a residue of colonialism and was marked by ambivalence and complexities.

CONCLUSION:

Finally, in my view, Orientalism is nothing but a continuous set of discourse. It changes its dimensions and becomes a weapon in the hands of imperialists. All the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric people, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extend punishment being required when orientals misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'orientals' mainly understood force or violence best, orientals were not like westerns, and for that reason served to be ruled

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," Kipling's verse started in the beginning of the first chapter. However, Kipling continues in a hopeful manner which could one day be accepted also in the study of India.

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the Earth!

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