

## Hegemonic tendency of the bigoted Westerners: A Study of Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Dr. Ved Parkash

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, NIILM University, Kaithal, Haryana, India

### Abstract

This paper focuses on hegemonic control of the West and how the Westerners established hegemonic control over Non-Westerners. It sheds light on how Westerners portrayed themselves as a superior race of the world. Through *Orientalism* Edward Said throws light on the practices which were employed for establishing superiority of 'the West' over 'the Orient'.

**Keywords:** hegemonic control, *orientalism*

### Introduction

Edward Said's assessment of the set of beliefs is known as *Orientalism*. It forms very important background for post-colonial studies. Edward Said defines that *Orientalism* is an ideology, in discourse to examine dominancy over the Orient. Edward Said says that with superior tendency, westerners are able to establish their hegemonic control over the Orient. Said says that superiority is an important aspect of the "Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 2004: 27) [8]. Edward Said summarized *Orientalism* in these terms:

My contention is that *Orientalism* is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the orient because the orient was weaker than the west, which elided the orient's difference with its weakness .... As a cultural apparatus *Orientalism* is all aggression, activity, judgment, will to truth and knowledge. (204)

Westerners studied about Non-Westerners' cultures, rituals, philosophies, conscience, psychology, ideology, thinking etc. After studying about Non-Westerners they felt that Non-Westerners have a number of faults, and Westerners can apply hegemonic control over the Orient. Westerners created their own boundary as 'the Occident' for themselves and 'the Orient' for Non-Westerners. Westerners created many symbols for Non-Westerners such as Eastern, other, orient, uncivilized, native, inferior race, aboriginal, superstitious, un-intellectual etc. Indeed, they wanted to establish hegemonic control over Non-Westerners, so they developed such titles, and created such myth that only the Occident can provide protection to the Orient. They claimed that their dominancy is rational, based on justice, and for the welfare of the world. They also described that they have to deploy forces sometimes to maintain balance between civilized and uncivilized people. Westerners developed many institutions such as educational institutions, religion, court, media, literature and bureaucracy etc. to determine supremacy of them. Concerning Westerners hegemony, Edward Said seems to follow Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of hegemony. As Gramsci has been very rightly remarked:

Hegemony is the nexus of material and ideological

instruments through which the dominant classes maintain their power. Hegemony thus mediates between the ruling ideas and subjects. The hegemony of the dominant class is maintained through coercion and consent. The material sphere is a structure that is allied with a superstructure of ideas. These ideas are institutionalized in the civil society; the law courts, the bureaucracy, the religious and educational systems. (215) The Europeans defined themselves as superior race in comparison to the Orientals, and they justified their colonization by concept of *Orientalism*. They said that it is the duty of Westerners to civilize the un-civilized world. The main problem, however, arose when westerners started generalizing the attributes which associated with the Orientals. Westerners portrayed artificial characteristics about the Orientals in their scientific reports, literary works, media etc. Intellectually regarding the European views about the Orientals, Said argued that 'the Orient' and 'the occident' work as oppositional terms, and the Orient were constructed as a negative inversion of Western culture deliberately. The work of another thinker Antonio Gramsci, was also important in shaping Edward Said's analysis in this area. As -- Said can be seen to have been influenced by Gramsci's notion of hegemony in understanding the pervasiveness of *Orientalist* constructs and representations in Western scholarship and reporting, and their relation to the exercise of power over the "Orient". (Said, 2004: 205) [8]

The generalized attributes associated with the Orientals can be seen even today, for example, Arabian are defined as uncivilized, cruel people; Muslims are seen as the terrorists; Indians are seen as the superstitious; Chinese are examined only as species of Martial Art and Japanese are seen as allied with Karate etc.

The Occident classified the world into two parts by using the concept of 'ours' and 'theirs'. An invented geographical outline was drawn between what was ours and what was theirs. The Occident defined them that they belong to the refined race and being the civilized it becomes their duty to civilize the Orient. To the civilization, they had to colonize and rule over the Orient. The Occidents remark that the Orientals are not capable to govern the government themselves;

since the Orientals feel that they are in the initial stage of the ruling system. Westerners showed themselves as the expert of the ruling system, and they say that the Orientals are not expert, so being expert it's their duty to provide help to the Orientals in many prospects.

Regarding qualities Westerners defined themselves as an active, rational, civilized, and sophisticated, and they defined 'the Orientals' as lazy, irrational, uncivilized, crudeness etc. Westerners described themselves as the discoverer of the Orientals. In his book *Orientalism* Said has been rightly illustrated:

A central idea of Orientalism is that Western knowledge about the East is not generated from facts or reality, but from preconceived archetypes that envision all "Eastern" societies as fundamentally similar to one another and fundamentally dissimilar to Western societies. This discourse establishes "the East" as antithetical to "the West". Such Eastern knowledge is constructed with literary texts and historical records that often are of limited understanding of the facts of life in the East. (Said, 1995: 27)

On the subject of Arabian-Islamic-Asian people, Edward Said seems to state that the bigoted westerners have subtle and persistent Euro-centric prejudices against Arabian-Islamic-Asian people and their culture. The bigoted Occident creates concepts about the Orient and through these concepts the Orientals are seen as separate, eccentric, backward, sensual, passive, conquerable, and inferior. In his book *Literary Theory Today* Nayar rightly notes:

Second-order knowledge was produced. This was the Oriental tale, the mythology of the mysterious Orient. All things in history, like History itself, were created for the Orient; it was set up as mysterious and barbarous long before anything was known about it. (186)

In his book *Orientalism* Said has been very rightly remarked: My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence -- in which I do not for a moment believe but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tenancy, in a specific historical, intellectual and even economic setting. (Said, 2004: 273)

Anthropologist Asad describes that Westerners keep control through critiques and interpretations. Asad rightly argues:

*Orientalism* is "not only a catalogue of Western prejudices misrepresentations of the East", but more so an investigation and analysis of the "authoritative structure of Orientalists discourse the closed, self-evident, self confirming character of that distinctive discourse which is reproduced again and again through scholarly texts, travelogues, literary works of imagination and the obiter dicta of public men and women of affairs. (648)

To comprehend Westerner's hegemony, Gramsci's ideas may be employed to analyze race and colonialism. In her book *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* Loomba has been rightly observed:

Scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies have used Gramsci to analyze contemporary political formations in Europe, as has the Subaltern Studies group of Indian historians to revise existing theories of nationalism and postcolonial social formations. (31)

Thus the knowledge of the West could never be reasonable

because it was also produced by human beings who were necessarily embedded in colonial history and relationships. In his book *The Soul of India: A Constructive Study of Indian Thoughts and Ideals* Bipin Chandra Pal has been very rightly remarked:

When ... the European scientist studies the physical features of our land, when he mensurates our fields, trigonometrates, our altitudes and undulations, investigates our animal, our vegetable or our mineral kingdoms, the records of his study are accepted as true and authoritative. But the study of man belongs altogether to a different plane .... (8-9)

Western colonial power forms the Orient as the 'Others' before dominating it militarily, politically and economically. In his volume *Literary Theory Today* Nayar has been very rightly illustrated:

European produces a category designated as the other or the orient through certain specific practices of knowledge acquisition and formation: philological, literary, ethnographic, geographic and so on. This knowledge and representation relies upon a series of binary oppositions, all of which treat the native as the negative/dark opposite of Europe: civilized/barbaric, white/black, mature/immature, strong/weak, masculine/effeminate, rational/emotional and progressive/primitive. Here the first term signifies the European and the second always applied to the native. This knowledge now treated as an authentic survey/history/study is then used for "material" practices such as racial discrimination, political control, and economic exploitation. (166)

Regarding Western hegemony, Edward Said seems to advocate Mannoni's interpretation of Western psychology. In his volume *Literary Theory Today* Nayar has quoted Mannoni's arguments on western thinking:

Westerners ultimately conclude that the European way of thinking is the right one, that the mentality of the native is incomprehensible, and that the European mode of thinking must be imposed upon the rest of the world. (169)

Said seems to rely on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, to explain power differentials between the East and the West. Concerning Westerners thinking Edward Said exemplifies Frantz Fanon's arguments:

The settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil, insensible to ethics, a negation of values." This was also accompanied by the description of the native as an animal usually snakes, vermin, rodents and other less-liked animals. (41)

Westerners set themselves as the father of the civilization, and for them; the Orientals are like children so they have to give much care to the natives (the Orientals). Due to moral duty, the Orientals should abide by of the father. Nayar rightly remarks:

Westerner must look after the poor native who could not look after himself. Thus the stereotype helps introduce a Western presence in various guises and roles of the protector (police, army), educator (teacher), administrator (bureaucracy and political presence), and savior (missionary). The cultural bias helped posit a political vision of otherness. (185-186)

The critique *Orientalism* is the production of ideas, knowledge and opinions about the orient and the occident. This included certain modes of representation of the Orient through 'the other'. In his volume *Literary Theory Today* Nayar has quoted

the comments of Said in which Said analyses his book *Orientalism*:

...reads a range of texts - literary, philological, philosophical, administrative, ethno-graphic and others. Said demonstrates that these texts were the lens through which the orient was viewed preliminary to being ruled. The texts were "worldly" in the sense they exhibit the pressures, preoccupations and prejudices of the world around them - therefore no text is free of its contexts of production. This meant that knowledge of literary imaginations could not be considered innocent, for they were complicit with the political agenda of colonialism. (185)

Westerners gain power through hegemonic culture. The subjugation of the East is achieved not only by direct coercion but also by partial representation of the Orient. Edward Said says that Orientalists (Westerners) have created their narratives about the history, life, character and destiny of the orient for centuries. An order of sovereignty is set up from East to West, a mock chain of being whose clearest form was given once by Kipling. In this perspective in his book *Postcolonial Animal Tale from Kipling to Coetzee* Nyman has been very rightly observed:

Mule, horse, elephant or bullock, he obeys his driver and the driver his sergeant and the sergeant his lieutenant and the lieutenant his captain, and the captain his major and the major his colonel and the colonel his brigadier commanding three regiments and the brigadier his general, who obeys the viceroy who is the servant of the Empress. (140)

Westerners gained knowledge about the world through the studies of the Orientals and the Occident are able to know about the terms and conditions of the civilization of the society. Further Edward Said describes about the Orientals that: "the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected..." (Said 206).

## Conclusion

Westerners define 'the Orient' under hegemonic approach. They constructed theories, policies about the orient. Prejudicial consciousness of the westerners is the centre of notion of hegemony. *Orientalism*, in Said's analysis is chiefly about the power and a feeling of superiority. Westerners think themselves that they belong to superior culture, and they deserve to control over non-westerners. Westerners justify their forceful intervention in the countries of the Orient that protection of the Orient was their own interest because they wanted to prove themselves that only Westerners can provide better security to the Orientals. Indeed, they want to gain consent of the Orient because they know beautifully that to maintain their supremacy, the Orient's support is much essential otherwise they will revolt against Westerners.

This paper investigates superior complex and imperialist thinking of Westerners. It also examines the origin of the Orient is the result of narrow thinking of Westerners and how Westerners deployed their superior complex as a tool to gain hegemonic control over Non-Westerners. Thus, Edward Said reveals hegemonic tendency of the bigoted Westerners about the Orient through his critique *Orientalism*.

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