

The Emergence of Discourses and Cultural Hegemony

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*A Study of Edward W. Said's
Orientalism*

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter I	1
Introduction	
Chapter II	27
Understanding the Project of Orientalism	
Chapter III	49
Orientalist Scholarship and Restructuring the Orient	
Chapter IV	71
Orientalism in Contemporary Times	
Chapter V	89
Conclusion	
Bibliography	97

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Edward W. Said (1935–2003) is a well-known name in the field of critical thinking in the contemporary age. His name is now synonymous with postcolonial theory. At the time of his death, he was a world famous writer and thinker. He was born in a prosperous Palestinian family in Talbiyah, a section of West Jerusalem, Palestine. His father, Waide “Bill” Ibrahim (American name: William A. Said) was an Episcopalian, while his mother, Hilda Musa, was a Baptist. He got his primary education in a school of colonial legacy in Egypt. Despite being an intelligent student, he could not adjust himself to the environment fostered by a colonial education. This colonial education had an immense impact on Said’s study of Orientalism, as he himself recorded:

Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an “Oriental” as a child growing up in two British colonies. All my education in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted (Said, 1978: 25).

In 1948, when Israel came into existence, he was just 12 years old. Like countless others, Said and his family became homeless. The rest of his childhood was spent in Lebanon and Egypt. Later on, he went to the U.S.A. for further studies; this up-rootedness proved a turning point in the formation of his mindset and was to have a long-lasting impact on his ideas. He could never forget these experiences, as he himself accepted, “I would describe my life as a series of departures and returns. However, the departure is always anxious. The return always uncertain precarious” (Said, 2004: 456). These experiences compelled Said to see modern Western culture as a creator of exiles. It shaped his philosophical understanding of history and culture. He attained a new outlook that refused to accept the prevalent readings of texts, cultures and identities. Sankaran Krishna, in his

“In one Innings” highlights this peculiar quality of Said in the following words:

Said contrapuntually rereads certain emblematic and canonical texts of Western literature, music and theater to demonstrate the implicit spatialization that allowed for their emergence and for their consolidation as canonical. He takes the idea of worlding as an act of assembling a whole world behind each text, a global set of possibilities that underlie them, and shows how differently these canonical texts can be read and appreciated when one places them in a genealogy that is attendant to questions of imperialism, displacement, conquest, exploitation, and the differential accumulation of wealth, status, and privilege “elsewhere” – an elsewhere that never seems to merit explicit elaboration in a self-referential metropolitan world (Krishna, 2002: 174).

Said advocated the need for a contrapuntal perspective – a method of thinking which interprets experiences that are discrepant. He abandoned the unified approach that goes by the master narrative, turning instead to a technique whereby marginal and apparently contradictory narratives wage battle. A contrapuntal approach is influenced by a hermeneutics of suspicion. He shattered the notion of universal values which claims Western culture as a source of “sweetness and light.” To him, this concept is the root cause of the cultural hegemony of the West, and thus he could not speak in “favour of an abstract universalism, because it’s usually the universalism of whoever happens to be most powerful” (Said, 2000: 390). He puts into question the logic of universalism in Western discourse and demonstrates how to reread Western literary texts in their historical context. He confronted the problem of cultural politics with an unprecedented boldness and intellectual freshness. This critical insight did not come upon him all of a sudden; rather, up to the age of thirty, he was confined to academic pursuits. It was the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 that shook him out of this confinement, as it led him to witness the terrible conditions of Arab refugees at close quarters. He describes that: “Israel’s war of Independence was a catastrophe for Palestine: two-thirds were driven out of their homes and country, many were killed, all their property was seized, and to all intents and purposes they ceased to exist as a people” (Said, 2000: 544). Said assumed the difficult task of bringing truth and light to the Palestinian cause in the United States. His role became even more prominent when the images

and narratives of the Palestinian struggle were misrepresented as hateful stereotypes by the Euro-American media. According to Aijaz Ahmad, commitment to the Palestinian cause had a formative influence on Said's intellectual framework. He says:

Edward Said is not only a cultural critic, he is also a Palestinian. Much that is splendid in his work is connected with the fact that he has tried to do honour to that origin; and he has done so against all odds, to the full extent of his capacity, by stepping outside the boundaries of his academic discipline and original intellectual formation, under no compulsion of profession or fame, in no pursuit of personal gain – infect, at frightening risk to himself (Ahmad, 1992: 160).

As posited by Aijaz Ahmad, it is true that the Palestinian experience is of great emotional and intellectual importance to Said. He advocated the Palestinian cause, yet never abandoned a vision of peace and negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians, and indeed was the first to recognize the irony of the fact that the Palestinians had been driven into exile by another people of “exile”. He believed that a mutual recognition of their respective histories and narratives could lead to a sustainable solution to this burning problem of Western Asia. The impact of this experience is quite conspicuous in Said's case. It evoked in his mind, a sense of history that works through subtle forms of power and politics.

Said is known throughout the world as a committed intellectual who endeavored to transform existing relations and concepts in the field of cultural studies. His groundbreaking contribution to cultural studies brought major changes in the understanding of humanities and the social sciences, while his intellectual presence continued to transcend the limited concerns of American academics. As a humanist and staunch liberal, he was an activist who worked courageously for justice, fearlessly speaking truths to power. He maintained his engagement with people, culture and politics all over the world; his intellectual life was basically a bold exhibition of human spirit working tirelessly against the most oppressive system of his times. It was his inner urge to decode the cultural subtleties of the underground politics of the dominant classes and rulers. It became his central concern and main impetus in his life-long intellectual journey– even attacks of a vicious and personal kind could not unsettle his ideological pursuits.

Said was sure that power relations govern human activities; he provided insight into the twists and turns between theoretical interests and social commitment. He exposed the entanglement and the state policy of cultural production. Throughout his life, he fought against the power of state, as reflected in Poul Bove's statement, "Said was nothing if not committed to the power of resistance and optimism that human struggles for freedom can be achieved" (Bove, 2005: 404), which supports the claim that Said's works revolve around his struggle against oppression. Most significantly of all, his views are applicable to contexts as diverse as the world itself.

Though Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire opened up the field of postcolonial discourse, Edward Said revolutionized it. V. I. Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) is one of the earliest works in the field of postcolonial study, however, Fanon was the first major cultural theorist to point out the cultural motives and the psychological effects of colonialism. Later on, Mannoni's work, *The psychology of colonialism* (1956) became a central text in this area. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) established postcolonial theory as an institutional enterprise. This theory is an attempt to uncover the colonial ideology in European texts about the "other" which generally means the native, and the non-European. It highlights colonialism's strategies of marginalizing the natives. Beneath its political and economic designs, imperialism is a cultural project too. Commenting upon this aspect of imperialism, Said says, "...the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said, 1993: 9). This perspective on imperialism and its power structures challenges the established notion of colonial relations. Colonial powers use various means ranging from political control to cultural dependency. Michael Doyle in this regard says, "Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or cultural dependence" (Doyle, 1986: 45). Imperialism is not merely an advancement or extension of geo-political influence; rather, it is a subtle process to perpetuate the prevailing rule, by

creating its own epistemology. It has been effected by the colonial powers “through politics, educational systems patterned to create the Western hegemony....” (Walia, 2003: 24), moreover, before the advent of postcolonial theory, “there was a conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth, whatever that might be” (Bhabha, 1990: 203); a ‘silence’ that gave birth to colonial otherness. Edward Said broke this silence and showed how literature and culture are related to the economic and political conditions of the age. There is a definite correlation between socio-economic conditions and the aesthetic works produced, whereby ideology, class and economic substructure directly influence literature and art. Literature is closely related to society, in that it reflects as well as shapes the complex ways in which ideas and material conditions interact. It is both a product of, and an intervention in, particular moments of history, as change in social, economic and cultural conditions is inevitable and is bound to affect the relations of power and the way in which they are inscribed in texts. In this way, truth is institutionally created. Language itself is socially constructed and always a potent means of enacting cultural politics in any given historical context. As such, art and literature seek to implement the ideology of the ruling class, which can be described as the “system of beliefs and assumptions – unconscious, unexamined, invisible which represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971: 162). Human consciousness, which consists in the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and with the help of which they explain what they take to be reality, is shaped by ideology. This ideology in itself is the product of the position and interests of individuals located in particular classes. In any given historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate its own interests. It manifests itself in different ways in the discourse of all the institutions contained in an era, and operates covertly to form and position the user of language as the subject in a discourse, subjecting and subordinating them to the ideological interests of the ruling class. Thus, the traditions and values, which literary texts recommend as standard, are always the traditions and values that the ruling class seeks to impose upon society for its own benefit. This imposition is effected by creating imaginary relationships between the ruler and the ruled.

The ideological methods of establishing hegemony in a particular system are always multi-layered. *Orientalism* is primarily a reconsideration of the widely accepted forms of the East-West relationship. Through his readings of literature, Said has tried to expose the cultural constructions of this unseen side of the unequal relationship. It may be pertinent to flag up that Said has actually unsettled the notion of “East” and “West” once and irrevocably. His writings reveal how the West continues to maintain its dominant position not only through acts of coercion but also through the cultural agency of language, literature and the arts. Hegemony is a practice of the material and ideological instruments which the dominant classes employ in order to maintain their power and supremacy over others.

Hegemony is a relatively recent term, but in Marxist criticism and historical studies on culture and politics, it has been in relatively frequent use. The increasing use of this term in literary studies is owed mainly to the growing interest in cultural studies. Before making a detailed analysis of hegemony and culture in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, it may be useful to trace the historical background of the term and its relevance in the context of Said’s ideas. In fact, hegemony is not a neutral or academic term— it has been derived from the political theory of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci who in his *Prison Notebooks* exposed the subtle politics of the dominant classes. He emphasized the point that there can be no “political hegemony” without an equal and more forceful domination in the area of culture and attitudes. Gramsci considered that a social class achieves its predominant influence and power by succeeding in making its ideological view of society (in which the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate), their own oppression. Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony influenced literary and social critics, such as Terry Eagleton in England, and Fredric Jameson and Edward Said in America. These critics concerned themselves with the power of literary culture to intervene and transform existing structures of economy and politics. Culture, in its best form, is found in civil society, where the influence of ideas works through consent. In civil society, certain cultural forms dominate over others. Gramsci identifies this domination as hegemony; it is “hegemony or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength” (Said, 1978: 7). Said’s theory of Orientalism is philosophically based on the tools of

demystifying ideologies as well as cultural processes, having borrowed the concept of hegemony from Gramsci. He himself tells of Gramsci's influence on his creative genius in the following words:

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci says: 'The starting-point in critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one is... as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.' The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci's comments at that, whereas Gramsci's Italian text concludes by adding that 'therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.'... In many ways my study of Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals (Said, 1978: 25).

Gramsci further describes how the hegemony of the dominant classes is perpetuated through coercion and consent. The material sphere is a "structure" that is allied with a superstructure of ideas, a cooperation which ensures that these ideas are institutionalized in civil society. The law courts, bureaucracy, the religious and educational systems, provide authenticity to this ideology, while the state, with its army and police, functions as a coercive apparatus. Furthermore, intellectuals are employed to naturalize this oppressive system, which helps in establishing a subtler form of control, which encourages the masses to accept things as they are. Michel Foucault is of the view that the discourse of an era brings into *being concepts, oppositions* and *hierarchies*, elements which are both products as well as propagators of power or social forces. In a particular moment in history, the existing discourses determine what counts as knowledge and truth at the time, as well as what is considered to be normal, against what is considered abnormal. Said found it useful to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archeology of knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to "identify Orientalism... the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the Post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1978: 3). Though Said uses the Foucauldian term as discrete elements of an apparatus, he refuses to accept the consequences of Foucault's own mapping of history. Aijaz Ahmad has a point to make when he studies different influences on Said:

If Foucauldian pressures force him to trace the beginnings of “Orientalist Discourse” from the eighteenth century or so, the equally irresistibly pressures of Auerbachian High Humanism force him to trace the origins of this very ‘discourse’, in the conventional form of a continuous European textuality, all the way back to Ancient Greece... he offers mutually incompatible definitions of ‘Orientalism’ so as to deploy both these stances, the Foucauldian and the Auerbachian, simultaneously (Ahmad, 1992: 166).

Impelled by Gramsci’s writings, Said draws attention to the intricate relationship between colonial ideology and capital, though he diverges from classical Marxists on the issue of economic determinism. He rejects the universal implication of 19th century Marxian structuralism with its emphasis on rationality and linear development. In its place, he employs a Gramscian focus on the relationship between ideology and material domination, along with a Foucauldian analysis of power and knowledge.

Aijaz Ahmad considers Said, “possibly the most important cultural critic”, (Ahmad, 1992: 159). Said criticizes the concept of culture which was developed during the Enlightenment, described by Matthew Arnold as:

The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the ‘best’ knowledge and thought of the time and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light (Arnold, 1988: 70).

For Matthew Arnold, society is the material base over which culture tries to spread its domain through the great men of culture. This culture creates the certainty of knowledge, which gives it an advantage over the liberal method of thought. It affirms that truth exists and can be known. Arnold establishes the presence of divine authority, the will of God behind culture, by which he means, “the universal order which seems to be intended and aimed at in the world, and which it is man’s happiness to go along with or his misery to go counter to” (Trilling, 1963: 266). Said sees a subtle form of cultural hegemony in Arnold’s concept of culture. He shows that Arnold does not lament the loss of commonly accepted values “but rather the assertively

achieved and won hegemony of an identifiable set of ideas, which Arnold honorifically calls culture, over all other ideas in society” (Said, 1983: 10). Arnold identifies culture with the state, an alignment which amounts to a colonial apparatus. It drew its strength from the Enlightenment project, which “was doomed to alter the quest for human freedom into a logic of domination and oppression. The desire to dominate nature had the lust for domination of human beings” (Harvey, 1990: 13), as David Harvey paraphrases from Horkheimer and Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979). Said, in his works exposed this unholy alliance between the Enlightenment and colonialism. To him, the word “culture” means:

...two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history (Said, 1993: xii).

He undertook the task of excavating the hidden motives behind high culture. As a secular humanist, he offered a critique of the great tradition of the Western Enlightenment. The most significant aspect is that:

...after Said has assembled the whole narrative of European Literature, from Aeschylus to Edward Lane, as a history of literature’s complicity in inferiorization of the ‘Orient’, and after he has identified the Enlightenment as a unified trajectory and master sign, of both Orientalism and colonialism, he is of course faced with the problem of identifying some sort of agency that might undo this centuries-old tie between narratives of high Humanism and the colonial project (Ahmad, 1992: 164).

Said criticized the nexus between the “Enlightenment” and the “colonial project”. He exposed how the concepts of knowledge and power led to the imperial enterprise in the Orient. (It should be noted that the Orient as analysed by Edward Said, is not what is popularly understood as the Orient, i.e. Far East Asia; rather it is the Middle East or Near East and India.) The Western notion of Orientalism is based on the “ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and (most of the

time) ‘the Occident’ (Said, 1978: 2). This promotes a “relationship of power and domination” which “puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationship with Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said, 1978: 7). The imperial West promoted the idea of Oriental backwardness through its academic, philosophical and other cultural expressions. It established a racial and cultural superiority of the West over the Orient, which Said deems to be a mythical notion which is central to the promotion and protection of European imperialist ventures. He shows how the political production of knowledge, and the dialectical relationship between knowledge production about the non-Western world, and Western colonial ventures led to the production of racialized knowledge, which in turn helped in the spread, as well as the maintenance of imperialism. In this way, knowledge about the Orient was not merely for the sake of knowledge; the production of such knowledge was necessitated by colonial practices.

The Western discourse of Orientalism produced ideas, knowledge and opinions about the Orient. This included certain modes of representation of the Orient through “othering”, wherein the Orient was “the distorted mirror-image of the Occident” (Hart, 2000: 66) and Europe’s dark other. It formed an important part of Western Enlightenment because in the absence of this other, there could be no “continued definition of the self” (Rath, 2003: 90), which is constituted by its past, present, and future. Western High Humanism constructed an ideal “other” against which it could articulate its identity. In order to fit the historical process of transformation, to conform the myth of cultural origin and evolution “Philosophy has always insisted upon this: thinking its other: that which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production” (Derrida, 1990: X). Thus, the imperial epistemology works through the centrality of Western consciousness. It is not possible to formulate a straightforward concept of this process, as culture is not a static process, having evolved over centuries with variations in experience and theory in different cultural contexts. In this regard, Raymond Williams says:

The concept of culture through variations and complication, embodies not only the issues but the contradictions through which it has developed. The concept at once fuses and confuses the radically different experiences and tendencies of its formation. It is then impossible to carry through only

serious cultural analysis without reaching towards a consciousness of the concept itself: a consciousness that must be as we shall see historical (Williams, 1977: 11).

To gauge the progress of the Western culture from the Stone Age to its present civilized status, Western intelligentsia produced romanticized and idealized portraits of tribes and tribal lives. To justify the slavery enforced on the Orientals, the European narrative of the “other” emphasized the conspicuous cruelty, the lechery, the perversity, and the inherent violence of the natives. They took on the burden of civilizing the “other” world that served to forge the imperial representation of this newly discovered world. History, reason and science were employed to establish cultural dominance. Orientalist studies, with such motives, gave power and knowledge to the conquerors to sustain the Empire. The Orient became “a pretext for self-dramatisation and differentness; it is the malleable theatrical space in which can be played out the egocentric fantasies of Romanticism” (Kabbani, 1988: 11). With this type of prejudiced consciousness, Europeans confronted the idea of colonization. This epistemology was not based on passivity; rather, a conscious political and hegemonic awareness which slowly finds expression in literary as well as nonliterary texts, formed its basis.

Edward Said destabilized the fixed ideas of history. He finds Orientalism to be a body of strength and power – a “cultural hegemony at work” (Said, 1978: 7). He studied the problem of textuality with the underlying ideological and institutional constraints which shape the writer’s mindset, and hence the discourse. Texts generally seem to present, or reflect an external reality but in fact consist of “representations” which are the ideological products or cultural constructs of the historical conditions specific to an era. Said believed that these cultural and ideological representations in texts serve mainly to reproduce, confirm and propagate the power structures of domination and subordination. Said analyzed a range of texts – literary, philosophical, philological, administrative and ethnographic, amongst others, demonstrating that these texts are the lens through which the Orient was viewed, thereby to establish Western hegemony over it. The texts are “worldly” in the sense that they exhibit the pressures, preoccupations and prejudices of the world around them –

therefore no text is free of its contexts of production. Knowledge, or the literary imagination was complicit in the political agenda of colonialism.

Said played a prominent role in the origin and development of postcolonial studies. His works *Orientalism* (1978), *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and numerous articles, played a key role in transforming the basic tenets of literary studies. He showed how material conditions sustain and conceal socio-cultural and economic inequalities, and affect institutions such as universities, the press and governments. His works reveal a much more complex picture of both institutional and cultural politics.

Books like *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) and *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966) established Said as an important literary critic. He could have led a secure life as a professor of literature in some American academy, yet he was not interested in this type of life. He not only analyzed the imperialism inherent in the ideology of American academics, but also fought against it actively. He considered the Israeli-Arab conflict not merely a struggle between two states but between a state funded by imperialistic powers, and the poor public fighting for freedom. He aligned himself completely with the pains and the sufferings of poor Palestinians. Traumas of “unhoused” Palestinians have been recorded in his book of memoirs *Out of Place* (1999). Through his books – *The Question of Palestine* (1979), *After the Last Sky* (1986), *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994) and *Peace and its Discontents* (1995), Said placed the hardships of Palestinians before the world. *Covering Islam: How Media and experts Determine* (1981) studies America’s hostility towards Islam. The American media has been creating a monolithic image of Islam, and presenting it as synonymous with terrorism. He raised many other topics in his writings, in addition to being an opera critic, piano player, television celebrity, politician, media-expert and popular essayist all rolled into one. *Musical Elaborations* (1991) is an important book as it transcends all the demarcations of caste, color, religion and state. Along with a Jewish music director, Daniel Barenboim, he organized public meetings on music, culture and politics. Their record has been published in *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* (2002). In this work, he emphasizes that in the face of larger issues, the love for one’s state loses its value.

His memoir *Out of Place* is ostensibly an account of the “lost” world, and was written when Said was living under the shadow of death. This book is the result of Said’s desire to leave a personal account of his experiences of the Arab world, where he was born and spent his childhood, and of America where he completed his school, college and university education. It also brings in WWII, Israel’s War of Independence, which rendered the Palestinians homeless, the end of the monarchy in Egypt and many other events of international importance, and shows how they contributed to the development of Said’s critical faculty. The largest collection of Said’s essays appeared under the title *Reflections on Exile and other Essays* (2000). It shows that the problem of modern culture is the conflict “between the housed and unhoused” (Said, 2000: 139). It further highlights how wars and imperialism, as well as the movement against it, economic and political revolution, famines, racial homicides and destructive consequences of the vast power structure resulted in human settlements being displaced. Some new developments which have been changing the occupations, cultural productions and topography of other parts are clearly visible not only in America but also in major Western cities like London, Paris, and Berlin. The idea of “exile” formed the principal narrative behind Edward Said’s life and work.

The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983) describes four types of criticism. The essays collected in this book derive from all four forms. Said claims that “texts are worldly, to some degree they are events... a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (Said, 1983: 4). Said draws attention towards contemporary critical consciousness, and claims it hangs between the temptations represented by two formidable and related powers engaging critical attention. One of these is represented by the culture to which birth, nationality and profession bind critics; the other is a method or system acquired by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort, and willed deliberation. The pressure exerted by these powers has resulted in the contemporary situation and will give birth to the new situation in future. Intellectuals and writers are the products of the interaction of these two powers (Said, 1983: 4). Said’s interest in 18th century figures like Vico and Swift is premised on “their

knowledge that their era also made claims on them culturally and systematically, and it was their whole enterprise therefore to resist these pressures in everything they did, albeit of course, that they were worldly writers and materially bound to their time” (Said, 1983: 26). The three most famous books by Said: *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam: How Media and experts Determine* (1981), deal with the history of the relationship between East and West. The historical and social setting of these books is political as well as cultural.

The impact of imperialism on the societies of the former colonies has been studied in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Colonial powers have invested heavily in these societies, which have manifested their power at different levels in the cultural realm. By challenging traditional aesthetic values, Said tried to find new ways of analyzing and investigating the structure that looks innocent and non-political. He revealed that the British fiction of the 19th and 20th centuries tried to legitimize imperialism, for instance, by seeking political dimensions even in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, which is considered non-political. In order to understand a novel it is necessary to analyse all the social, cultural and political circumstances related to its production. Said observed that authors like E. M. Forester, Joseph Conrad, and Rudyard Kipling wrote novels which did not raise the basic questions, but nevertheless played a very prominent role in naturalizing the Western dominated relationship between colonizer and colonized. Said offers an insight into the process of literary creation that goes on in the mind of a writer. He established its relationship with culture and empire in the following words:

My method is to focus as much as possible on individual works, to read them first as great products of the creative or interpretative imagination, and then to show them as part of the relationship between culture and empire. I do not believe that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history, but authors are, I also believe very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure (Said, 1993: xxii).

Undoubtedly the main battle within imperialism is over land, but the issues like *who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, and had the right to plan its future*, were “reflected, contested, and even for a time

decided in narrative.... The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (Said, 1993: xxiii). To highlight this relationship between culture and imperialism, Said analyses Conrad’s *Nostromo*. In this novel “Conrad seems to be saying, ‘We Westerners will decide who is a good native or a bad, because all natives have sufficient existence by virtue of our recognition. We created them, we taught them to speak and think, and when they rebel they simply confirm our views of them as silly children, duped by some of their Western masters’” (Said, 1993: xxviii). This ideology exerted great pressure on the general population or ‘masses’ of Britain and France, who viewed and felt their colonies with a combination of familiarity and distance, but never with a sense of their separate sovereignty.

Orientalism (1978) is Edward Said’s is the most famous book, which paved the way for postcolonial studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak considered it a “source book” (Spivak, 1990: 221). It compelled the West to re-assess the assumption of the Islamic world in particular, and the whole of the Orient in general. He critically analysed the French and British consciousness of the Orient and exposed the subtle politics behind the creation of the Orient in Western discourse. In the words of Gayatri Spivak; “It was the study of the construction of an object, for investigation and control” (Spivak, 1990: 221). In the political and literary texts of the West, the Orient is depicted as something to be studied, and as something that can be judged, as in a court of law. It had been taken to be something that can be disciplined in school or prison. The Orient was contained and represented by dominating frameworks, while being denied self-representation. Moreover, no one from outside would give vent to his/her anxieties and concerns. Under such circumstances the study of “colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said’s, has however, blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for” (Spivak, 1990: 221). In this way, Said can be seen to have offered insight into the subtle practices of colonialism. Through this book, he shed light on the epistemological underpinnings of colonial projects, the practice of writing histories, and the marginalization and dehumanization of the native by colonial powers. Harry Harootunian in this regard comments:

Said's "*Orientalism*," the most Foucauldian of the trinity, was committed to revealing how representational strategies were implicated in figuring colonial otherness from teasing out the political unconscious of novels to showing the involvement of scholarly research in constructing images of the colonized that would serve the interests of policy and domination. Here culture and representation were plainly seen as functioning to satisfy the requirements of politics, claiming a basis in authoritative knowledge and experience, these representations, undoubtedly mediated by received cultural conceits and political necessity, were indirectly linked to the colonizing project (Harootunian, 2005: 436-437).

This book is not a product of disinterested intellectual striving for academic excellence, but rather it is based on Said's own experiences, as he divulges:

My own experience of these matters is in part what made me write this book. The life of an Arab-Palestinian in the West, particularly in America is disheartening....The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny (Said, 1978: 27).

The personal experiences which went into the making of this book gave Said critical insight into the contemporary international political and cultural atmosphere. As Aijaz Ahmad says, *Orientalism*,

...marks such a radical break in Said's own intellectual career precisely because the writing of this book was an attempt at coming to terms with what it meant for him to be a Palestinian living and teaching in the U.S.A., armed with not much more than a humanist intellectual training, a successful career as literary critic, and a splendid mastery over wide areas of European literary textuality (Ahmad, 1992: 164).

Although Palestinian experiences had great impact on Said's intellect, *Orientalism* cannot be considered merely a book of Middle Eastern Studies, or of any established academic discipline; rather it belongs to "the well-known intellectual tradition of writers debunking the great monuments of their own academic discipline or examining the complicity of intellectuals in dominant ideologies and fabrications of illegitimate power" (Ahmad, 1992: 173-174). This tradition includes such disparate writers and works such as Nietzsche himself, Paul Nizan's *The Watchdogs*, Césaire's *Discourse*

on *Colonialism*, Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, Erskine Caldwell's *Notes on a Dying Culture*, and Noam Chomsky's extensive writing on the complicity of American social science in the Vietnam War. Although Orientalism heralded a struggle against domination, it cannot be considered an anti-Western construction. Said never regarded Orientalism as a symbol of the entire West; rather he was against all categorical designations like Orient and Occident. Said feels that:

Orientalism did a great many things. During its great age in the nineteenth century it produced scholars; it increased the number of languages taught in the West and the quality of manuscripts edited, translated, and commented on; in many cases, it provided sympathetic European students, genuinely interested in such matters as Sanskrit grammar, Phoenician numismatics, and Arabic poetry (Said, 1978: 96).

Said wrote *Orientalism* with the motive of foregrounding its implicit mode of sharing cultural attitudes. He studied the psychological effects on both the colonizer and the colonized. The Orient had a special place in European experience, namely, it led Said to associate Orientalism with, "a quasi-Nietzschean 'will-to-knowledge' or 'will-to-power'; seen from this angle, Orientalist discourse reflects not a serious engagement, but rather a social 'imaginary' or mode of 'representation' imposed for purely strategic ends" (Dallmayr, 1996: xvi). He exposed the presence of empire and colonialism at the very center of Western ideology. As much as *Orientalism* succeeded in creating an awareness against the imperial policy, it "examines the history of Western textualities about the non-West quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonized countries" (Ahmad, 1992: 172). Though Said gave enough space to the Western representation of the Orient, he did not say anything about the response of the Orientals to the Western hegemony. In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he writes:

What I left out of *Orientalism* was that response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization all across the Third World. Along with armed resistances in places as diverse as nineteenth – century Algeria, Ireland, and Indonesia, there also went considerable efforts in cultural resistance almost everywhere,... there was

always some form of active resistance, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out (Said, 1993: xii).

Certainly, Said did not discuss the resistance posed by the colonized societies in his *Orientalism*, but his role as a critic of cultural hegemony of the West did not end with the conclusion of this book. Right up to his last breath, he fought against imperialism, which is now learning new ways to spread its domain. Nevertheless, he never liked any label being stamped on him; in an interview he said, “I don’t like labels. I find that there is a quality of reification in a label, of a school, a dogma, an orthodoxy...” (Singh, 2004: xx). He even disliked being known as a postcolonial critic. In another interview he accepted it in the following words:

I do not think I belong to that field. First of all, I don’t think colonialism is over; really. I don’t know what they are really talking about. I mean colonialism in the formal sense is over, but I am very interested in neo-colonialism...So I think to use the word postcolonialism is really a misnomer... (Singh, 2004: xx-xxi).

This statement of Said’s stands true, as the colonizers have now evolved new techniques to expand their dominion, by expanding their territories to the heart and mind— areas which remained unconquered in the first phase. The dominant classes employ physical and ideological tools to maintain their power and supremacy over others.

This chapter tries to locate Said’s place in contemporary postcolonial criticism. Although Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire opened the field, it was Said who revolutionized it. His highest achievement was exposing the unholy alliance between the Enlightenment and colonialism. Said is known throughout the world as a committed intellectual who transformed the existing relations and concepts in the field of cultural studies. He worked for justice, and fearlessly spoke the truth to the power. He maintained his engagement with the people, culture and politics all over the world. His intellectual life was basically a bold exhibition of the human spirit working tirelessly against the most oppressive system of his times. This chapter shows that Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is a reconsideration of the widely accepted forms of East-West relationship. Through his readings of literature, he tried to expose the cultural constructions of this unseen side

of an unequal relationship. He has actually unsettled the notion of “East” and “West” irrevocably, and reveals how the West continues to maintain its dominant position not only through acts of coercion, but also through the cultural agency of language.

Chapter Two traces the sources on which Orientalism depends for its meaning and scope. The Orient has a special place in European experiences. The term used for those who teach, write about, or research the Orient is an ‘Orientalist’, while ‘Orientalism’ itself is a system of knowledge about the Orient; an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into the Western consciousness. Even the Western liberal humanists, who talked about democracy, the rights of women and labourers could not escape it, and clearly stated that such ideas cannot be applied to inferior civilizations. A large number of writers, politicians, economists and administrators have accepted this basic distinction between East and West, and as such, it has been taken as the starting point for advancing on theories, epics, novels, and political accounts concerning the Orient. Said reveals that literature is not independent of the economic, social and political conditions specific to an era. Indeed, he clearly states that all discourses are formed and structured by the particular conditions of their time and place.

The scope of Orientalism depends on political institutions and government policies. This chapter describes both pre-Napoleonic, as well as Napoleonic projects. There were efforts to appropriate the Orient through translation in the in the pre-Napoleonic era, which provided a precise intellectual and historical dimension to the Orient. Napoleon constructed institutes so that a systematic study of the Orient could be conducted. He showed an interest in Islam and the Koran to win the heart of Muslims, but his real intention was to expand colonial rule over Egypt. Development in the field of science and technology widened the scope of Orientalism. For instance the opening of the Suez Canal enabled the West to expand its rule up to the Far East. In a similar vein, the Industrial Revolution necessitated the search for raw materials and a market, which intensified the colonizing process. Up until WWII, France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism, but after the Great War, America replaced them as the central agency. The Euro-American metropolitan center praises itself for providing absolute government in the Orient, because it was considered necessary for the

‘development’ of the Orient. This “will to power” is purported to be the responsibility given by some divine power. This chapter attempts to show that without the help of cultural politics and literature it would not have been possible for the colonial powers to expand their rule. Writers provided the knowledge about ‘subject races’, which proved to be the most important requirement to perpetuating colonial rule.

Chapter Three is an attempt to trace the development of modern Orientalism by means of a broadly chronological description, and by outlining of a set of devices common to the work of important poets, artists and scholars. The concept of Orientalism took shape from experiences based on earlier encounters between the East and the West. The influence of scientific progress brought about the redefinition and restructuring of the pre-existing notions of the Orient. To highlight this restructuring of the Orient, Said analyses various Western texts. During the Romantic era, it was assumed that the East would rejuvenate the West, an assumption which Said finds deceptive because on the surface level, this implies that Asia will regenerate Europe. In reality, this argument implies that Europe will regenerate itself by using the Orient. The striking irony of this is that the writers who propounded this theory considered their vision reconstructive and global. It is an effort to rebuild the world according to Westernized hierarchy, with the added assistance of scientific technology. However, theoretically, the supporters of this theory drew their strength from the Christian myth of death-rebirth, and they viewed the Orient as a storehouse of mystery. However, this thought process is not as neutral as it appears on the surface. The expectation of salvation through contact with Oriental culture was in fact a strategy by which to mould the self-image of the Orient. Said reveals that neither Christianity nor the Enlightenment was independent of the broader interests of the West; moreover, its intentions were primarily economic. To this end, a cultural project was initiated, whereby neo-classicists wrote on almost every aspect of European society and Romantic writers had nothing new that could surprise the reader. Therefore, they turned to Oriental myths; a step which proved decisive in orientalizing the Orient, as they converted the Orient into a marketable commodity. To make it look ‘strange’ its history was restructured in the so-called ‘philological laboratory’. This chapter is a document of resources employed by the

Orientalist to construct the historical and intellectual circumstances of their age, an enterprise in which literature played a decisive role.

Chapter Four deals with contemporary Orientalism, exposing the direct bearing which society, cultural traditions and worldly circumstances, had on literary works. Neo-colonialism aims to occupy the ‘inner territory’ or ‘psychological space’. Literary, as well as non-literary discourses are conditioned by these extrinsic factors. WWII played an important role in the history of Orientalism; the post-WWII era saw a shift of the locus of power from Britain and France to America. Though American Orientalism has its own distinct features, it’s fuelled by French and British Orientalism, and treats the Orient as a market for its industrial goods as well as cultural images. The American media plays an important role in protecting the derogatory image of the Orient and, as such, the Orientals are pictured as inferior to Americans. These images have a great impact on the Orientals, and they willingly accept their “secondariness.” In this way, the sensibility of the Orientals has been reconstructed to suit the Euro-American metropolitan center. This chapter also sheds light on latent- and manifest Orientalism, respectively. Latent Orientalism constitutes ideological strength, unchanging with the passage of time. Orientalists are divided in their view the Orient, but have similar ideological dimensions which are transmitted from generation to generation. They have helped Orientalism survive world wars, revolutions and other historical upheavals. On the other hand, various methods and policies adopted by the Orientalists are termed as manifest Orientalism. Thus it can be argued that the term changes with time and place. Specifically, this chapter serves to show that the contemporary phase of Orientalism is objectified through globalization and modernization– a long-term strategy to deprive the Orientals of their primary resources and to convert them into laborers on their own land; this is executed strategically by convincing them that they cannot manage their own resources.

In the last chapter, it is concluded that postcolonial studies, heralded by Said, brought forth a new era in the history of literary criticism. He showed that, the recent return to a political and historical reading of literature provides a complex picture of cultural politics that, in turn, forms an integral part of literature. Before the advent of postcolonial studies, literary works

were considered to be supreme instances of aesthetic creation divested of any politics. In this chapter, it is highlighted that writers are very much a product of their time and space. It shows that the political and ideological concerns of a literary artist color his or her works, a revelation after which the process of reading and writing texts ceases to be a neutral activity. Said gave a voice to those who were marginalized in the Western text. His study displaced the writers from their high, God-like position. He considers them a product of their circumstances and reveals the derogatory images of the Orient produced by them; nevertheless, they're free of blame for Said, because they were not at liberty to choose their subject matter. Writers have to follow tradition and the taste of the reader. These writers produced the myth of the Orient because they were writing from a higher position, provided to them by scientific progress and military power. The main aim behind this book is to develop a critical sense that lends the capacity to look behind linguistic construction.

Every culture has its own system of hierarchies, which places a few in the dominant position while marginalizing others. In a civil society, people are made to fall in line with the dominant ideology, which is achieved by consent. However, it is not a simple process because culture like human life in general, is not a static process, but rather has evolved through centuries, with variations in experience and theory in different cultural contexts. Therefore, there is a long history of efforts behind cultural formations, and traditions have voices of consent or dissent in them. Every society imposes codes and conventions to be followed by its members. This book concerns the Euro-American hegemony, which is being imposed on the world from outside; in the earlier phase thereof, the West established its hegemony by military occupation, religious conversions and myth-making while, in contemporary times, it is being established in the name of globalization, modernization and democracy. Literature has always played an important role in the establishment of hegemony because it is generally viewed as something detached from politics. Various writers in the West have projected the image of the enlightened white male who is placed on this earth to civilize lesser beings. With the help of literary works, the Orient is created to suit Western and European dominance, compelling the Orientals to accept this myth as fact.