

Orientalism : A Perspective

Chetna Gupta

M. Phil., Research Scholar,

Deptt. of Philosophy, University of Delhi, Delhi

Abstract

This paper discusses Orientalism framework. In the first part of this paper, I talked about an account of historical context of Orientalism with special reference to Edward Said. In the second part of this paper, I discuss Orientalism which is seen through different perspectives along with the advantages and disadvantages impact on Orientalism. In the third part of this paper, I discuss Peter Heehs, six different styles of Orientalist discourse about India, along with Sri Aurobindo national Orientalist in order to show that Indocentrism culture and Eurocentrism culture both needs one another. I have explained Indocentrism by using the example of Aurobindo as a national Orientalist and Eurocentrism by using the example of Edward Said as a Western Orientalist. I have noticed that after Edward Said's analysis on Orientalism, many recent changes too place, which was ignored by him.

Keywords: *Orientalism, Edward Said, Peter Heehs, Aurobindo, Indocentrism and Eurocentrism.*

Reference to this paper
should be made as
follows:

Chetna Gupta

**Orientalism : A
Perspective**

,RJPSS 2017, Vol. 42,

No.2, pp. 84-90,

Article No.13 (RS2037)

Online available at:

[http://anubooks.com/
?page_id=442](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=442)

Introduction

Edward Said's Orientalism is most prominent in Indian historiography. But his approach is quite different from various Orientalists. The term '*Orientalism*' was applied to the study of the languages, literatures and cultures of the Orient which exist between the period of the mid-eighteenth to the late twentieth century. The term 'Orient' refers to the people who are living or used to live in Eastern world, or the middle or the Far East in relation to Europe and the opposite of 'Orient' is 'Occident' which refers to the people of Western world. The construction of the Western Imagination is regarded as the idea of Orient. It has been said that the successive generations of European and American Orientalists, dedicated their whole entire life to the writing of Indian culture, religion and philosophy. They studied, compiled, edited and translated the basic Indian texts. We should also be aware of the terms like Orientalists and Orientals. The power to observe, study and a source of knowledge are essential for Orientalists, whereas for Orientals, the source of information and passivity are needed. Orientalists are referred to the people's who researched into India's past and these people came from Western countries like Europe, America etc. and Orientals refers to the people's relating to the countries of the Orient. Orientalists task was to structure historical representations. "*Orient*" and "*Occident*" are only man-made. They don't exist at all in reality. The Orient is only an idea that has a thought of history. Imagination and vocabulary have given it the reality and presence is given by the West.

In the first part of this paper, I talked about an account of historical context of Orientalism with special reference to Edward Said and then will explain the meaning of Orientalism in opposite to Liberalism and the connection that exist between Orientalism and Nationalism. In the second part of this paper, I discuss Orientalism which is seen through different perspectives along with the advantages and disadvantages impact on Orientalism. In the third part of this paper, I discuss Peter Heehs, six different styles of Orientalist discourse about India, along with Sri Aurobindo national Orientalist in order to show that Indocentrism culture and Eurocentrism culture both needs one another. Indocentrism deals with the idea which says that India is regarded to be central to other countries and Eurocentrism deals with the idea that Europe is regarded to be central to other countries. I have explained Indocentrism by using the example of Aurobindo as a national Orientalist and Eurocentrism by using the example of Edward Said as a Western Orientalist.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century Orientalists like William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke discovered the greatness of ancient India and

defined it as a glorious classical age. According to the Orientalists the essence of Indian civilization is embodied in its languages, laws, institutions and religious texts. The Orientalists discovered the ancient texts and gave them true meanings. They were taken as the mediators between the past and the present.

After the Orientalists in the early 19th century Liberalists came and criticized Orientalists by saying that India has no history at all, so no contribution is given by Orientalists. After the Liberalists, Nationalists came and they rewrote history and had also return to the ancient past of India. Their task was to construct Indian identity, they rejected Liberalists and accepted the position of Orientalists notion of India's past.

The major work on Orientalism was given by Edward Said (1978). He wrote a book named as *Orientalism* which describes the dynamics of contemporary history. He said that neither the term Orient nor the concept of West has any ontological stability. Each is made up of human effort. In this book, Said (1978) uses humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle so that a longer sequence of thought can be introduced.

According to Said (1978), Orientalism is involved in worldly, historical circumstances, and it also appeals on the use of rationalism. Orientalism is an investigation through which we propose intellectual ways for handling the methodological problems that history has brought forward. The main task for Edward Said (1978) was to engage readers to make use of his work so that they might produce new studies of their own.

Materials & Methods

I have used analytical and qualitative method in this paper. I have taken help of many books and research papers.

Observations

In this part, I focus on the different perspectives of Orientalism. The different perspectives of Orientalism, will enlarge our knowledge more on the overview of Orientalism, and is also associated with the appreciation and criticisms of Orientalism. I will first discuss the view of Vasant Kaiwar (2010), who was in favor of Post colonialism. He was regarded as a Postcolonial Orient. According to Vasant Kaiwar (2010), if we want to understand Post colonialism, then we have to first understand Orientalism which deals with the questions of Eurocentric universalism.

Eurocentric Universalism deals with the perspective of European thinking. If we think of Orientalism from the perspective of the present, then we come to know

that it is linked with the notion of “*difference*”. Difference can be seen within a universal/particular binary and the form of multiculturalism that replicates the notion of universal (Europe) at one end and a multiplicity of particularities (non- Europe) at the other end. Through this discussion, I am able to know about the Eurocentric Universalism, how it affects Orientalism.

I discuss Rahul Sapra (2011) in order to criticize Orientalism. His work shows the flaws of Orientalism. For criticizing Orientalism, I use Rahul Sapra (2011) views. He attacked Western representations of the Orient. His attack led to exposure of the association that exists between Western knowledge and imperialism. He said that the Seventeenth century travel narratives represent the ideology of colonialism which they wanted to impose on India. Europeans thought that the natives are taken as ‘*inferior*’ in terms of both race and religion. He also said that most current approaches work do not object the theoretical framework used by Said in defining the discourse of Orientalism.

Now I discuss the advantageous impacts of Orientalism that were seen in the work of Bart Moore- Gilbert (1996) and Robert J.C.Young (2004). According to Bart Moore- Gilbert (1996), contemporary colonial discourse comes in the picture because of Said’s Orientalism. Robert Young (2004), said in his book named *White Mythologies* that in the work of Said, we were able to find the problematic historicist forms of knowledge, because only Orientalism deals with history.

The rediscovery and revitalization of a Hindu golden age was the Orientalists most enduring contribution to modern India’s cultural self image. For the Orientalist the process of modernization was important. They want that Indians might change themselves according to their own value systems through the way of modernization. The Orientalists links the regional elite with the dynamic civilization of Europe.

The disadvantageous impacts of Orientalism were seen in the work of Spivak and Lisa Lowe etc. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is well- known for her cultural and critical theories that challenged the legacy of colonialism. Her view was discussed in the book named *The Limits of Orientalism* by Rahul Sapra (2011). She said that we should find the possibilities of a counter discourse. She said that India cannot be taken to symbolize the rest of the Orient. Heterogeneity with regard to Postcolonial cultures is also needed. She both questions and uses Said Orientalism. The burden of English on Indians, were due to Orientalism.

Lisa Lowe (2011) tries to destabilize Orientalism. Lowe in the book named *The Limits of Orientalism* said that the main flaw in Said’s Orientalism was that he

constructs a singular history of Orientalism. She said that Orientalism cannot be applied in a consistent manner throughout all cultural and historical moments. For Lowe the element of heterogeneity in the discourse of Orientalism is needed, which is missing. These all criticisms against Edward Said's Orientalism will help me to understand the concept of Orientalism in more good way.

Discussions & Results

I have analyzed that criticizers are more than appreciators of Orientalism and this is my result. But, no one has talked about India's Orientalist discourse except Peter Heehs (2003), that's why I discuss Peter Heehs (2003) view point regarding India's Orientalist discourse. I will summarize Peter Heehs six different styles of Orientalist discourse about India in relation to Aurobindo Nationalist approach. The explanations of these Orientalist discourse about India are as follows:

- (a) Patronizing Orientalist: It is the period that exist from 1750 to 1947 and after. In this period, the Asiatic society of Calcutta in 1784 was formed. Patronizing Europeans taught their English language to patronized Indians.
- (b) Romantic Orientalist: It is that period which exists from 1800 to 1947 and after. British Orientalism was connected with British kingdom during the Colonial period. Sarda (1917) said that "*The Vedas are universally admitted to be the most important work of the Sanskrit language, as well as the greatest work found in all literature.*"
- (c) Nationalist Orientalist: - It is that period which exists from 1850 to 1947 and after. Sister Nivedita (1973), writings on India shows a nationalistic turn.
- (d) Critical Orientalist: - It means the period of 1947 to present. This period deals with historiographical issues.
- (e) Reductive Orientalist: It means the period of 1978 to present. Ronald Inden (1990), in his book named *Imagining India* try to deny Indian agency.
- (f) Reactionary Orientalist: It means the period of 1980 to present. The restoration of India's ancient glory and rewriting its history will be taken as a critique against European and contemporary writers.

In last discussion, we have seen Peter Heehs (2003), six different styles of India's Orientalist discourse, now I discuss how Peter Heehs (2003) elaborate one of his National Orientalist approach, in the face of Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo was known as a typical nationalist scholar. Aurobindo (2001) was sent to England for the study. He read the Upanishads, which was in the English translation given by Max Muller. Aurobindo (2001), main aim was "*To present to England and through England to*

Europe the religious message of India.” Religion of Vedanta, for Aurobindo (2001) was regarded as the supreme expression of the one universal religion. According to Aurobindo (2001), India’s superior values will help the West in recovering its spiritual balance. The above discussion shows us that Aurobindo as a National Orientalist was against European Orientalism, that’s why Peter Heehs (2003) uses Aurobindo view point.

Conclusion

In this paper I investigate Orientalism through different perspectives with special reference to Edward Said and Peter Heehs. Orientalism is used as an object of study, languages and peoples of Eastern cultures by Westerners. Edward said was very obsessed by the Western attitudes, because they only wanted to show their power’s or authority over the Orient (Eastern people). There are some faults in Edward Said’s Orientalism also, which I discuss. Orientalism involves a detailed effort to build an edifice of knowledge about remote histories and cultures, but Said limited his work only to the generalizations and casual remarks, which had no relation to the academic enterprise. It seems to me that whatever he wrote on Orientalism, shows his anger rather than sorrow. After Edward Said’s analysis on Orientalism, many recent changes too place, which was ignored by him. As the 20th century wears on, the power of the West faded because Non- Europeans make use of European techniques and share its power and wealth. Peter Heehs shows Indocentrism and Eurocentrism cultures, by using Aurobindo’s and Edward Said’s works on Orientalism.

References

- Bart Moore, Gilbert. 1996. *The Literature of British India, ed. Writing India, 1757-1990. New York: Manchester University Press.*
- Datta, D. M.(1956)- *India’s Debt to the West in Philosophy.* Philosophy East and West.6, 195-212.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism. United States of America: Pantheon.*
- Heehs, Peter. (2003) *Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography.* History and Theory. 42, 169-195.
- Kopf, David. 1969 *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance (The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835). Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay.*
- Kaiwar, Vasant. 2010. *What is Postcolonial Orientalism and How Does It Matter?*
- Perett, Roy W. 1998. *Truth, Relativism and Western conceptions of Indian Philosophy, Asian Philosophy.* An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East

8, 19-29.

Sapra, Rahul. **2011.***The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India.* Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press.

Schreiner, Peter. **1978.** *The Indianness of Modern Indian Philosophy as a Historical and Philosophical Problem.* *Philosophy East and West* **28 (1), 21-37.**

Young J. C, Robert. **2004.** *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West.* Routledge.