



THE POLITICS OF ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM

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ABSTRACT :

This paper is about the concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism and the politics, which revolve around these concepts in world, with a special emphasis, on India's contemporary scenario, which have its roots in history and its various interpretations. After this we will analyse how the concept of orientalism was used by the Britishers as a tool of exploration and for their hegemonic constructed ideology, and how it actually benefits the Britishers in India.

*The myth they created is primitive as compared to the prevailing advanced myth of India and the long traditions of liberal and pluralistic values, which prevailed in India. After which we will discuss about the Post-Modern concepts of Neo-orientalism. How the threat of clash of civilization is evolving there and how it can be overcome by a well furnished understanding of India's Indianess. This paper is slightly oriented towards the theoretical sphere as compare to the factual content but facts are provided where they are necessary. As **Gopal Guru** says that there are some "**Theoretical Pundits**" and some "**Empirical Shudras**" in India-while I tried to write this paper into a theoretical structure filled up with the empirical facts.*



KEYWORDS : Orientalism, Occidentalism, Myth, Post-secular.

INTRODUCTION:

Orientalism is a concept which is used by colonizers for their colonies for depicting these colonies as the countries in the east of the Mediterranean, usually referred to as Asia. The term arises out of a western viewpoint that sees this region as pre-modern, traditional and mysterious. This assumes the absence of historical change in society of India, all institutions were static, where there is an absence of private property in land, all the powers are concentrated in the hands of despotic rulers, where the kings remain absorbed in sensual pleasure of wealth and the common masses were subjected to endless poverty. This pattern, is commonly applied to all Asiatic societies envisage any marked economic change, while the juxtaposition of the orientalism is Occidentalism, which also arise out of a western point of view that sees the country in the west of Mediterranean, usually refers to western Europe. It meant the countries which were modern and industrialized, had a proper law and order which arose out of the cultural supremacy of the west and triumphant values or the Victorian values by the Britishers. They were a proud of their rationality, reason and ability to move beyond the kingdoms of sapiens to Homo sapiens or the **Eudaimonian** concept of Aristotle.

The historical roots of orientalism in India can be traced from the early writings of history by Britishers and Nationalist writers.

Romila Thapar in her book, "**The Past As Present**" shows – that there are three arguments which are foundational to the colonial view of Indian history are - (a) Periodization (b) Oriental despotism (c) Hindu society.

- **Periodization** was done by James Mill in "The History of British India" told about their periods; Hindu civilization, Muslims civilization and the British period. These were the civilizations which were based on the religions in which primarily the Hindu and the Muslim which were very hostile to each other and on the basis of census 1872, the Hindu were depicted as a majority, while the Muslim came to be seen as minority. Absence of historical change, the only thing that changed was the religion of the Kings and Emperors.
- **Oriental Despotism**: It is a form of society which tends to be mysterious, oppressive, despotic ruler and static in economy.
- **Hindu Society** : The Hindu society has always been divided into four main **varnas**. Therefore the history of India remains unchanged through centuries. These varnas were the foundation of Aryans dominating through race, language and religion. Aryan race, has a language Sanskrit with a Vedic Brahminism religion. The earlier people who were living in India much before were seen as Dravidians and inferior to them.
- In all these three arguments, Indian society was projected as alien or backwards or sapiens and in order to become homo-sapiens or civilised Indians should try to copy the Britishers or adopt the culture of Europe with Victorian values. And then comes the myth of "**Enlightened Despotism**".

Bipin Chandra in his book, "**India struggle for Independence**", showed that there are two terms related to (a) Benevolent and (b) Despotism.

- (A) Benevolent means that the rule of Britishers are for the benefits of colonial people, Britishers were considered as the "Mai-Baap" of the people, that they were economically, socially and culturally developing India, as the people of India are primitive and backward, capable of manual labour but not of intellectual reflection; they could work in the fields but not rule themselves; they were skilled copyists but not creative. So, it is "White man's burden" – as the Joseph Chamberlin and the British defensive poet **Rudyard Kipling**, describe about it, it is the sacred duty of British Empire to carry civilization that is Christianity and British law to the "backwards" i.e. people of India.
- (B) Despotism means that the colonial ruler was invincible as the Britishers claim that "the Sun never sets on the British Empire", so it is futile to oppose them as Indians are too weak and short to oppose them.

But what led Britishers to make the Indians believe the Britishers were Benevolent, how Britishers did that and why? Let's find out.

The concept of hegemony propounded by the Italian Marxists Antonio Gramsci, means that "A state cannot rule its subjects by sheer force". State had to develop some ideological false consciousness in the minds and hearts of the ruled, and it seems to the ruled that whatever is happening is for the benefits for the colonials the devices for constructing a hegemony are education, church, societal values, which he termed as "structure of legitimation".

It is because of this hegemonial construction that the Myth of Benevolent came into existence and the Britishers were capable to capture the minds and to exploit the Indians. We can understand it through a word – Post truth i.e. word of the year 2016.

What Abraham Lincoln said, "You can fool some people for the time, all people for some time, but you cannot fool all the people for all the time."

What Britishers depicted of Indians was solely spiritual and lack of economic changes. The only thing that was changing was the religion of the ruler/king, the Hindus were static, and the Aryans were the sole dominant race of India which was divided into four varnas. It is absurd, because if India is only a spiritual country then how it became the major economy in 18th century. According to "British economic historian Angus Maddison, India's share of the world economy was 23 percent, which was as large as complete

Europe put together. It had been 27 percent in 1700, when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's treasury was ranked in £100 million in tax revenue alone. And by the time Britishers departed from India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent."

All this shows that India is neither wholly spiritual, nor static in economy, this is not the "Asiatic mode of Production", said by Karl Marx, which was later rejected by Indian Marxists.

India has so much wealth because of its thriving economy which it was trading with the world economy. Henry Patullo in 1772, a company official, once proclaimed that the demand for Indian textiles could never reduce, since no other nation, can produce the goods of the same quality.

Let us turn to an important crop **Indigo**, it grows primarily in the tropics. By the 13th Century Indian Indigo was being used by cloth manufacturers in Italy, France and Britain to dye cloth. However only a small amount of Indigo could reach the European market and thus its price was very high. So Europeans depended on another plant "woad", to make violet and blue dyes. But cloth dyers still prefer the Indian Indigo, as it produced a rich blue colour, whereas the dye from woad was pale and dull. The heights and the quality of Indian textile was that the tag of "made in India" was considered as a symbol of royalty, richness and assurance of high quality in Britain and other parts of Europe.

Then how the highly industrialized but not mechanised India become the world's least developed countries in the world when Britishers left India. Britishers did all this, through a systematic policy of "De-industrialization" in India. British industrialists pressured the British government to impose import duties on cotton textiles, so that Manchester goods could sell in Britain without any competition from outside. At the same time industrialists persuaded East India Company to sell the British manufactured goods in Indian markets as well. Thus by waiving off import duties or negligible import duty in India, the Britishers successfully monopolized the textile market both in Britain as well as in India.

Sarcastically, the first benevolence of Britishers was that, "Robert Clive on his first return to England took home or by looting £2,34,000 from his Indian exploits. Clive came back in 1765 and returned 2 years later to England with a fortune estimated at £4,00,000 within 30 years and after 1757 the Land revenue collected just in Bengal went up from £8,17,553 to £26,80,000.

Dadabhai Noorji in his book, "Poverty and Un-British Rule in India" devised the economic drain theory in which he argued India has exported an average of £13,00,00,000 worth of goods to Britain each year from 1835 to 1872, with no tax correspondence to return of money.

In 1901, William Digby calculated the net amount of the economic drain in 19th century, with remarkable precision, at £4,18,79,22,732. He only accounted for the 19th century, worst was to follow in the 20th century.

Now the second benevolence was surging deaths i.e. 30 and 35 million Indians died from starvation during the British Raj during famines, some called it British Colonial Holocaust. For all this Britishers blamed the factors of burgeoning population, declining rice production, role of climate etc. On the contrary, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen explained, there has never been a famine in a democracy with a free press, because public accountability ensures effecting response, the deaths were not a result from the lack of food but from the lack of access to food, that hence the distribution is the key to avoid such deaths. Even cattle died in India was also beneficial to British Raj as the export trade in hides and skin rose from 5 million rupees in 1859 to nearly 115 million rupees in 1901.

And we can see the heights of Benevolence when the suffering of victims was reminded to Churchill and when the officers wrote in a telegram to P.M. about the scale of tragedy, **Churchill's** only reaction was to ask peevishly: 'Why hasn't **Gandhi** died yet?'

So the Myth of Benevolence or Enlightened despotism, they created in the mind of Indians seem contrary when we look into these figures. Hence neither they are Benevolent nor they are invincible when they ceased to rule India in 15 August, 1947.

This is even contrary to, "Codes of caste", i.e. Dharamshastra, which prescribes the four duties – Dharam (Religion), Arth (Trade), Kaam (Sex) and Moksha (Liberation) – out of which Dharam and Moksha are

spiritual while the other two Kaam and Arth were materialistic, so the society of India was neither wholly spiritual nor wholly materialistic.

What Britishers depicted was that all the Epics of Indian society are "Myths" in negative sense, it is the so-called modern interpretation of myth which seems to be as falsehood. But in India there is new interpretation of myth or the post-modern interpretation of myth by **Devdutt Patnaik** in his book, "Myth=Mithya". "Everybody lives in myth, nobody like to live in falsehood. Everybody believes that they live in truth. There are many truths, some truths which are everybody's truth, and everybody truth is fact, like hunger, fear etc. while the Harry Potter is a fantasy, i.e. nobody's truth, in between these two truths, their lies "somebody's truth" in it. This is my myth; this is a fact for me, let me believe in it. It may be fantasy for you or others but for me it is fact. That is the world of mythology, respecting other people's belief. So myth is a world between fact and fiction.

It is because of this myth which led to the golden age of India, which again led to the Golden age of trading and Proto-industrialisation which led to belief or this confidence building measures, which is the success of India's culture, because there is partial truth in everybody's myth and when the myths get clashed with other, the partial false of both the myths get dismissed and what we get is "A truth" but not "the truth" unlike the Hegelian Philosophy of the ultimate "truth", knowledge is a relative concept not an absolute one.

The problem with the western interpretation of myths that it leads to define truth in a definition of "The truth or ultimate truth" based on and science, which leading to the homogenization of society of west, leads to the universal truth and knowledge, which they called as white man's burden, there is little scope for believing and respecting others' views, which lead to a homogenous, static and overlapped diversified society in west, while India has a long historical traditions of 3000 years of difference, doubt, and Arguments – in the book India Dissent by Ashok Vajpeyi.

In his book there are one hundred seventy eight persons in the history of India who raised their voice against the popular belief, value and culture of their contemporary time. I would like to mention some selected names from this book as – Gautam Buddha, Rishabdev, Bhartihari, Basavanna, Andal, Tulsidas, Namdev, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Meerabai, Amir Khusro, Dara Shikoh, Lalon Fakir, Mirza Asadullah Khan Galib, Rammohun Ray, Jyotirai Phule, Tarabai, Rabindranath Bose, Ismat Chughtai, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Kanu Sanyal, Paash, Jay Prakash Narayan, Kaifi Azmi, Romila Thapar, Narendra Dhabolkar, Irom Sharmila, Amartya Sen, Rohit Vemula, Zakia Soman, Soni Sonri, Gauhar Raza, Ravish Kumar, Gauri Lankesh are some of the persons of dissent. **Dr. Amartya Sen** has pointed in his books, The Argumentative Indian that "**Nasadiya Sukta**, the Hymn of creation, a major verse in the Rigveda, ends with radical doubt : " Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? When was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe, who then knows whence it has risen? Whence this creation has risen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in the highest, only the knows – or perhaps he does not know.

And that is what New-orientalism is all about as stated by **Akash Singh Rathore** that the Indians are using the methodology or framework comprise purely western perspective and terminology. He inserted that why we need to adopt the western universal grand concepts such as secular, colonialism etc. The need is to have own Indian Political theory by backing upon the living experiences of Indian Political life and by presenting and innovating, systematic, compelling case for India. There is a need to return to 'tradition', but a hybrid and evolving tradition. He introduced a "principle" of reform alongside the return, which is analogical to what is widely known as "Difference principle", that is the principle that any modification to be made must benefit the least advantage.

In the time of post-colonial era and globalisation, contemporary pluralism becomes a matter of fact.

Now we have to turn our heads beyond the European university history, because it is the need of hour, due to globalisation, the migration has caused on a large scale, those who migrate also take their culture with them, thus those European society which have a history to crush and suppress its diversity through either Nazi's propagandist techniques or through the "melting point" of U.S.A.. These practices are termed as "Principles of regulation" (multi-culturalism) and the "Practice of regulation" (assimilation of

ghettoization). The perfect expression of the triumphs of these patterns can be found in Fukuyama's idea of the 'End of the history? The model was of a stable world which is stuck to triumphant of this paradigmatic model.

But in post-globalisation, where society is become more and more multifaceted, we have adopted the new concepts and interpretation and on one count India has certainly have an advantage because of its deeply diverse society, what "Hurgun Habermas", propounded the term "post-secular" – his position on this term as a mean between two extremes, of theocratic on the one hand, while secular on the other. Post-secular is the inclusion of tradition, with reform based on "Principle of difference". Publications of Salman Rusdie's "Satanic verses" are routinely counted as a post-secular writings, while Habermas became Eurocentric, when he said that it can only be applied to affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Cannada, Australia and New Zealand, it is there he made a misunderstanding and underestimated the "**vibrant plural public sphere**", which has historical roots in Indian culture.

While the west, with their claims of universal absolute knowledge of west, now grappled with the problem of multi-culture, ethnic societies or what - Arnold Toynbee's 26 (twenty six) civilizations have nevertheless merely been replaced by Samuel Huntington's eight (8) in the general perception of civilization, and Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilization is that the major civilization of world which lead to concentrate the civilization according the "**European formula of Nationalism**" : One language, one religion and one nation, this idea tend to formulate on the lines of occidental claim which lacks the most important element of the society that is to **recognition of diversity**, which now we are watching the rise of Rightest Political parties in Europe and their policy, the Donald Triumph – President of U.S.A. said, **America for American's** and strict policy of visa and restricted to the Islamic countries, while the Israel's new claim of the Jewish Nationality this new "Nation state law which states "The right to exercise national self-determination" in Israel is "unique to the Jewish people, or the Islamic State (I.S.) wants to build a country along religious line, Iran also proclaiming the self-determination, challenging the U.S.A. with its Shia, theocratic structure and institution, no doubt our sister country Pakistan also laid its foundation on the basis religion that is Sunni Islam, and what was shocking to all that India's recent "The citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016", which aims to give citizenship only to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhist, Parsis and Christians excluding Muslims from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh is running along the lines of the primitive western idea of nationalism, these all are examples which are not only sufficient but also adequate to say that the thesis of the clash of civilization is somehow true in the near future. So this problem of multi-culturalism can be overcome by the well and proper understanding of India's Indianess. So, I rest my paper by adapting the starting lines of "Communist Manifesto" of Karl Marx – "The spectre of multi-culturalism is haunting the Europe."

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