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ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LIFE OF NATIVES – A CRITICAL ENQUIRY

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ABSTRACT:

The term Orientalism is derived from the Latin word Oriens, which literally means Rising Sun. Occident is the opposite term for it. In terms of old world, Europe was considered as the West or Occidental, and the furthest known eastern was the East or Orient. According to Said, “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historians, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (E. W. S 1978: 2). Orientalism is a term that is used by art historian, literary and cultural studies scholars.



Orientalism is the study of eastern societies, cultures, languages and peoples by Western scholars. It can also refer to the imitation or deception of aspects of Eastern culture in the West by writers, designers and artists. Since the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism in 1978, the concept of Orientalism changed its meaning and intentions. Much academic discourse has begun to use the term Orientalism to refer to a general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies. In his book Said has challenged the concept of Orientalism or the difference between East and West.

KEYWORDS: *term Orientalism , anthropologist, sociologist, historians.*

INTRODUCTION

Orientalists represent the cultures of natives to the Western reader and audience by pointing out similarities or dissimilarities among the native cultures, the term 'other' can be another country, people of another religion, gender or race. What we are not is represented as the other and the other is represented as unknown and non-familiar. There are two different ways of dealing with the other. One way is, the other is treated as familiar by

pointing the apparent similarities. Another way is by differences between the West and the other. “Defining, naming or classifying the other is not peculiar to any one culture. Rather, it takes place within, as well as with respect to, other cultures. Naming the other becomes problematic when one party tries to domesticate the other” (S. S 2003: ix). How did Orientalist Scholars perceived the quality of life of natives people. We can quote what William Wilberforce,

leader of Evangelical group in the House of Commons, said in 1793 that “The natives must be taught a better religion at a time and in a manner that will not inspire them with passion for political change”. He understood that the Indian natives were idolatrous and superstitious with a feeble knowledge of God. The people themselves were barbarous and low measured in the scale of European civilization (A. M 1988: 27). This paper attempts to explore the misrepresentation of the

quality of life of natives by the Orientalist; and how Orientalist scholar, writer, traveller, missionary, colonial administrator understand the quality of life of natives in the scale of civilization by taking particular examples.

ORIENTALISM – AN OVERVIEW

The idea of Orient was almost a Western construction. When the Orientalist scholar, traveller, missionary, poet, colonial administrator represented or described the Oriental people, land, custom, religion, etc to the West. They made a distinction between the Orient and the Occident. They accepted the difference between the Orient and the Occident at the starting point in their writing, and did not verify it whether their description of the Orient is objective or biased one. As indicated by Said, "Along these lines an extremely huge mass of journalists, among whom are artists, writers, savants, political scholars, financial analysts, and majestic chairmen, have acknowledged the fundamental refinement among East and west as the beginning stage for expand speculations, sagas, books, social portrayals, and political records concerning the Orient, its kin, traditions, "mind" fate, etc". The Orientalist isolated the world into two sections, the East and the West or the Orient and the Occident. This was absolutely a fake isolation and it was laid based on the idea of 'Them' and 'Us'. The most significant utilization of Orientalism to the Europeans was that they characterized themselves as the differentiating picture, thought, character and experience of the Orient by characterizing the Orient. For instance, the Orientalist comprehended the oriental as apathetic, nonsensical, and crude yet they are dynamic, normal, socialized (E. W. S 1978: 1-3).

The tradition of Orientalism did not start in the time of world exploration or the colonization of third world countries. It had a long tradition. It's started at the time of Herodotus and Alexander. In Said's words, "worry with the Orient had its own custom of order and chain of command from finally the second century B.C. on, it was lost on no explorer or eastbound looking and aggressive western overlord that Herodotus – history specialist, voyager, endlessly inquisitive recorder – and Alexander – ruler warrior, logical victor – had been in the Orient previously. The Orient was there for subdivided into domains recently known, visited, prevailed". After Herodotus and Alexander, Christianity and travelers like, Marco Polo (who charted the trade routes) filled the gap between the Occident and the Orient. They built up a structured archive from the literature from these experiences and created a restricted number of typical encapsulations. From these stereotype experiences they try to understand the Orient (E. W. S 1978: 57-58).

The Orientalist representations about the Orient were determined by the nationality of the Orientalist, the changing political landscape and the change in the conceptual apparatus. Accordingly, there are varieties of Orientalism, depending upon the political, economic and socio-cultural concerns of the nation to which the Orientalist belonged to and the Orientalist representations were also classified as early modern and high modern, Catholic and Protestant, British, French, German, Russian, Portuguese etc.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LIFE OF NATIVES

In his book, '*Orientalism*', Edward W. Said questioned a pattern of misrepresentation of the Oriental people and their lands by the Euro-American poets, writers, travellers, missionaries, scholars etc. These poets, writers, travellers, missionaries, scholars described the Oriental people and their lands in an 'exotic' way and they romanticized it. And this is an artificial one. Further, it can be said that Orientalism is a set of representation of the Orient by the Orientalist. They claimed that they represented the orient in a neutral, objective and scientific way. In this way, the Orient became a discursive reality and denied any other dimension of the reality. The various types of discourse about the Orient have gained through repetitive and stereotypical knowledge, and they were produced with the help of various disciplines of knowledge. Later this knowledge about the Orient became an absolute source to look or understand the Orient. (B. B. M 2005: 36-37). West acquires a new type of idea to represent the Orient to the Western audience theatrically. According to Said, "Our initial description of Orientalism as a learned field now acquires a new concreteness. A field is often an enclosed space. The

idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe” (E. W. S 1978:63).

During the time of world exploration and colonization European scholars, travellers, missionaries came to the Orient. They described, wrote about the Oriental people, custom, culture, religion etc. and they imagined that Orient was a great civilization in the past but it has fallen at present; hence the Orient needs the help of Occident to restore the ancient glory of the Orient. In Said’s words, it means “To restore a region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness” (E. W. S 1978: 86).

John Stuart Mill claimed liberty and representative government could not be applied to India because Indians were civilizationally – if not racially – inferior (E. W. S 1978: 14). According to Mill representative government and liberty are not suitable for uncivilized society like India. He actually makes an illusory statement, because he compared Indian society with European knowledge. He imagined a governing system for India according to the European cultural context. There were evidences of representative system or democracy in ancient India. During the period of ‘*Matsyanyaya*’, the term is more often used in India political history to denote the political condition of Indian during 650 C.E – 750 C.E, i.e. when Gopala, ascended the throne of Bengal under the Pala dynasty, having selected by the *Prakriti* (people or the nobles) (Khalimpur Copper Plate). According to Rhys Davids, during the time of Buddha, “A single chief – how, and for what period chosen, we do not know – was elected as office-holder, presiding over sessions, and, if no sessions were sitting, over the state”. Before that in Buddhist literature, it is mentioned that the selection of the head of Sangha was done by voting; and head of the Sangha can not nominate his successor. By gathering of Bhikkhus, of a particular area, they themselves elect their head of the Sangha. If there is no consensus, then the person with the majority will be elected as head of the Sangha. For the selection of the head of Sangh, they use sign of wood piece (N. B 2000: 123-124). Though, we can not compare the selection of head of Sangh with the practice of modern representative democracy through popular franchise. But Mill missed this aspect.

In The film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, directed by Steven Spielberg in 1984. The food such as, monkey brains, beetles cooked inside a snake etc or portrayed as the cultural food of the natives. In fact, most of the natives do not eat anything remotely similar to monkey brain. However we find that the food of the native is represented inaccurately as something exotic.

European scholars, writers, travellers and missionaries came to the Orient. The study of the Oriental people, geography, religion, Oriental literature, custom etc. was transformed into an institution for dealing with the Orient. They have done so “ by making statements about it , authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over Orient” (E. W. S 1978: 3). They created the Oriental discourse. And this Oriental discourse was theatrically manage with the intent to legitimate the colonial rule as civilizing mission. So the Orient was reconstructed or made by the Orientalist effort.

CONCLUSION

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident. It is the long tradition of western scholarship on the Orient. Later, the Orientalist discourse became a referential work to understand the Orient and the actual Orient became less important.

Orientalist sees the Orient as a spiritual, emotional and European are rational, material. The Orientalist scholar sees the native people as opposite to the European self. Native people became ground for the binary distinctions the white and the brown, the civilized and the primitive, the Christian and the pagan. These binary divisions give the colonizers grounds for justifying the European project of colonization of natives and proselytization. With the European scale of civilization, they understand the quality of life of natives as uncivilized, pagan, idolatrous, savage, and barbarous.

Each society or community has their own understanding of the ways of life. It will be determined by the geographical, socio-economical, socio-political, and cultural aspect of that society or community. When Euro-American centric Orientalist came to the Orient and tries to explore the Orient. They try to homogenize the ways of life of the natives in the scale of Euro-American standard.

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