Preface

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is commonly regarded as a reference point for postcolonialism. *Orientalism* represents the first phase of postcolonial theory. It does not engage with the ambivalent condition of the colonial aftermath or with the history and motivation of anti-colonial resistance. It pays its attention to the discursive and textual production of colonial meanings. The objective of this study is to situate Edward Said in the postcolonial studies. The major argument in this thesis is that Said’s theoretical location is ambivalent. Said takes a vacillating stand between poststructuralism and liberal humanism. He betrays an uneasy relationship with Marxism and poststructuralism. He has an anti humanistic understanding of colonial power and Western knowledge and at the same time he has a profound belief in the political and worldly obligations of the postcolonial intellectual. This study explores in detail Said’s trajectory as a literary critic and postcolonial theorist with all its paradoxes and problems. The central idea of this study is to locate his place as a literary
critic and cultural theorist and to situate him in the field of literary criticism and theory.

The first chapter, "Mapping the Postcolonial" is concerned with postcolonial studies in general. A broad mapping of the field is attempted here. It is not an exhaustive survey of all the trends and figures in the area. My attempt is to focus on major trends, positions and the important representative figures. The origins of postcolonial theory are rather complex. It looks at a historical series of imaginative and theoretical projects involving colonization and its aftermath. The scope of the subject is very vast. It comprises the theories and generalizations of the writings of and against empire.

At the outset of this chapter we discuss the various theories of postcolonial perceptions and experiences formulated in the term "postcolonial". Its subtle shades of meaning and different trends it has set are examined. As the term "Postcolonial" means different things to different people a general consensus cannot be arrived at. Theorists such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin use the term postcolonial to refer to events and texts from the beginning
of colonialism to the present. For them postcolonial covers colonial and anti-colonial writings and theoretical explorations of colonialism. But Critics like Aijaz Ahmad argue for limiting the term to the period after decolonization.

In this chapter we analyze the genealogy of postcolonialism by situating it in the historical experiences of decolonization and the post war intellectual developments, which resulted in the shift from commonwealth studies to colonial discourse theory and then to postcolonialism. At this juncture we touch upon the theoretical developments, back to Aime Cesair, Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul Sartre, as the precursors of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theories, as we know it now, are by and large poststructuralist in their orientation. The introduction of the idea that colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule but also simultaneously as a discourse of domination was the achievement of Edward Said by his work *Orientalism*. Said's intervention was simultaneously enabling and theoretically problematic.

Towards the end of this chapter we examine the criticisms levelled against postcolonial theories by critics of materialistic
disposition like Arif Dirlik, Aijaz Ahmad and Terry Eagleton. They target the post structural bias of postcolonial theory. Their main complaint is that there is a shift of focus from activist politics to textual politics. They also complain that the theories are located in metropolitan academies bereft of any actual contact with Third World situations and their struggles.

The second chapter "The Intending Self and Method" analyses Said's first major theoretical work *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. This chapter tries to show how this work presages Said's major concerns and critical postulates which acquire their definitive shape in his later works. *Beginnings* draws heavily on Vico's philosophy. The very concept of beginning is derived from Vico who distinguished between origins and beginnings saying that the origins are divine whereas the beginnings are human. Said's theoretical ambivalence in its nascent form can be found even in this early work. He resists the radical structuralist attacks on the function of an authorial intention. In *Beginnings* we find a prolonged and detailed meditation on this issue. Said takes a safe but complex course between individualist conceptions of
creativity and creativity as the mere function of a system. This position is some way between humanism and structuralism. In this chapter we analyze the problems arising out of this position such as the contradictions in his assumptions about the self, the distinctions between beginning and origin and the uniqueness of modernism.

Said's *Orientalism* was a turning point in Western thought and criticism. Considering that the book was written by a Third World intellectual working in a metropolitan academy of great prestige its reception was phenomenal. It has received unprecedented attention in the West as well as in the East. *Orientalism* analyses the material and institutional factors of the whole of the project and practice of the colonial enterprise, not merely as a particular military and economic strategy of Capitalist societies. It also considers the specific historical discourse of knowledge articulated with the operation of political power. It was Said who appeared more than anyone else to have taken up the formal articulation of the political and ideological commitments of the anti-colonial movements. What is interesting about *Orientalism*
is that, however influential, it has always been seen to be theoretically and politically problematic. The third chapter is a detailed examination of the content and methodology of *Orientalism*. In both levels the book is riddled with anomalies and ambivalences. Many of the problems that have generated such intense criticism around Said's text result directly from the way Said formulates the idea of "discourse" in *Orientalism*. Though a fundamental concept in postcolonial theory, the colonial discourse has never been fully theorized or historicised by Said. The theoretical problems in Said arise out of his attempt to combine the anti humanism of Foucauldian post structuralism and traditional humanism. Another set of problems can be identified in terms of his attempt to integrate a realistic epistemology with post structuralism that view discourse and language as prime constitutive factors of reality. There can be no "real" orient because the 'Orient' is itself an Orientalist construction. Like the "Third World" the "Orient" is a name for something that at one level is real but at another level does not exist in that general form as an object of knowledge. In *Orientalism* Said
vacillates between these mutually incompatible philosophical positions.

The fourth chapter entitled "The Worldly Text and the Critic" examines his essays collected in the work *The world, the Text and the Critic*. When we examine this work, a more materialist and worldly Said emerges than the Said of *Orientalism*. This book reveals the emergence of the methodology and the concerns of all works of Said.

In this work said argues for the need for intellectual work to recover its connections with the realities of the society in which it occurs. According to Said the problem of contemporary criticism is its functionalism which gives too much attention to the formal aspects of a text with little considerations to its materiality. This position is a negotiation between two attitudes to the text which in different ways misrepresent how the texts have an existence in the world. Traditional realist position sees the text as simply referring to the world "out there". On the other hand the structuralist inspired position sees the world as having no absolute existence at all but as being entirely constructed by the text.
Said's critical identity could be discerned from his concept of secular criticism. By secular criticism he means a criticism freed from the restrictions of intellectual specialisation. In this connection, he advocates "amateurism" in intellectual life. Since a critic's function and the function of an intellectual is "to speak truth to power" his Reith lectures entitled Representations of the Intellectual is also considered in this chapter.

Said's view is that criticism is an "oppositional" activity. The aim of criticism is to expose and dismantle all established dogmas. Said's "secular criticism" aims to arrive at a sense of what political, social and human values are entailed in the reading, production and transmission of every text. But he refuses to identify himself with any well defined and stable theoretical stand. 'Secular criticism' in fact constantly undoes "theory". "The critical consciousness is awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhaust the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported and, above all, critical consciousness is the awareness of the resistance to theory,
reactions to it elicited by those concrete experiences or interpretations with which it is in conflict” (*The World* 242). This is considered as a retreat from the excess of theoretical speculation. But it cannot be considered as merely as that. But it should be taken as a determined attempt to reinstate a resolutely atheoretical conception of criticism’s nature and function. (Bennet 198)

The next chapter “Culture as Imperialism”, examines Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*. It is a continuation and extension of his earlier work *Orientalism*. Here Said’s attention is focused on literary texts rather than on non-literary texts examined in *Orientalism*. The role of culture in keeping imperialism intact is highlighted here. The ideological and cultural support enables the imperialists to have suzerainty over the colonised people. *Culture and Imperialism* begins from the premise that the institutional, political and economic operations of Imperialism are exercised with the complicity and connivance of cultural artifacts. In this chapter Said’s concept of culture is compared to Matthew Arnold’s idea of culture as well as that of Raymond Williams. Said’s *Musical*
Elaborations is also considered here as his bias towards canonical high culture is pronounced predominantly here. Despite the fact that Said is critical of the high culture’s complicity with imperialism here we find him remaining highbrow in his attitude towards culture. A close scrutiny of the book reveal that Culture and Imperialism remains much more enigmatic and ambivalent than his other works. Said’s concept of resistance as “voyage in”, privileging the Third World intellectuals located in the metropolis over others is a highly questionable proposition, especially, when viewed against Said’s metropolitan background.

The sixth chapter of this study, entitled “Knowledge, Power and Palestine” examines his works on Palestine and Islam. Said’s attention to Palestine probably constitutes the largest part of his oeuvre. These works on Palestine and Islam reveal, at once, Said as an activist and his concepts of the unholy relationship between power and knowledge. This idea was first enunciated in Orientalism but in his works on Palestine we find the consolidation of these ideas and its application in analysing the contemporary realities. Said’s treatment of
Palestinian topics in his writings is the key to the prominence of his theme of worldliness in his thinking and writing. As Ashcroft *et al.* put it, Palestine locates Said's own worldliness in the world. (*Edward Said* 117).