Chapter 3

Orientalising the Orient

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* analyses how the knowledge that the Western colonial powers formed about their possessions helped to justify their subjugation. *Orientalism* examines the various disciplines, institutions and styles of thought by which Europeans understood the “Orient” over several centuries. European imperial powers like Britain and France spent a huge amount of money and time producing knowledge about the colonies they ruled. Said’s major concern is to reveal the relationship between knowledge and power. Orientalism both constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them. Focussing his attention in particular at representations of Egypt and Middle East in a variety of disciplines, Said argues that European travellers in these regions did not try to learn much about the natives they encountered. They registered their observations based upon certain preconceived notions about the “Orient”. Said’s analysis is aimed at illustrating the ways in which the representations of Europe’s civilisational “other” has been
established over the centuries as a feature of its cultural hegemony.

The publication of *Orientalism* had a great impact, especially, on metropolitan academy. Even today it remains a site of controversy, admiration and criticism. Said's study is used as a model for analysing the various methods in which Europe's strategies for knowing the colonised world also became excuses and institutional attempts for dominating that world.

According to Said Orientalist scholars always operated within certain boundaries such as the assumption that European civilization was the pinnacle of historical development. Despite the multiplicity and variety of Orientalist disciplines, these assumptions remained the same. These Orientalist studies were always designed to confirm the "inferior", "primitive" and "degenerate" nature of Oriental societies and languages. In this respect, Orientalism could be seen as a "discourse", a coherent and strongly bounded area of social knowledge.

The most important influence upon Said's *Orientalism*
was the French poststructuralist Michel Foucault. He theorised the way power is internalised by those it disempowers through ideology or language. Said appropriates Foucault’s ideas of discourse and power:

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of a discourse as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish* to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European Culture was able to manage— and even produce— the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period [. . .] How this happened is what this book tries to demonstrate. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (Said, *Orientalism* 3).
A discourse is a system of statements by which the world would be known. There are certain tacit rules that determine what can and cannot be articulated within a discourse. When these rules cover a number of disciplines, providing boundaries within which knowledge can be produced, that intellectual habit of speaking and thinking becomes a discourse such as Orientalism. What is known is determined by the way it is known: the rules of a discipline determine the kind of knowledge that can be gained from it. This Foucauldian insight informs Said's analysis of Orientalism. The discourse of Orientalism had many rules that operated within the area of habit, expectation and assumption. Orientalism examines how the formal study of the Orient consolidated certain ways of seeing and thinking, which in turn contributed to the functioning of colonial power. Discourses not only describe and analyse reality, they also seem to create the reality they appear to describe. According to Said "Orient" is a construct created in Orientalist discourse:

A text purporting to contain knowledge about
something actual and arising out of circumstances similar to the ones I have just described is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical success warrant. Most important, such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given discourse, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it. (Said, *Orientalisam* 94)

The argument that Orientalism is a coherent discursive formation is one of the major premises put forward by Said in *Orientalism*. Said brings together a range of creative writers, statesmen, political thinkers and philologists who contributed to Orientalism as an institution which then provided the lens through which the Orient would be viewed and
controlled. Said's attempt is to show how knowledge about non-Europeans was part of the process of establishing power over them. Focussing on this aspect has allowed Said to explain and elaborate it as one of the instruments of cultural domination and imperial control. Constructing the "Orient" within the discursive boundaries of Orientalism, European knowledge was able to maintain control and power over it. Orientalism thus demonstrates the link between knowledge and power, for the Orientalist discourse constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them.

Orientalism is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter Said examines the range and scope of Orientalism. Orientalist discourse has great variety and different dimensions both in terms of historical time and experiences and in terms of philosophical and political themes. Orientalism has been in existence from the ancient period onwards and it continues into the present. Said identifies certain common themes in this diversity and he illustrates the similarities between diverse ideas such as Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality and Oriental splendour. The second chapter attempts
to trace the development of modern Orientalism by chronological description and also by identifying certain devices common to the work of important poets, artists and scholars. Here Said tries to explain how the important philological, historical and creative writers based their views upon a tradition of knowledge that helps them to construct and dominate the Orient. The colonial administration subsequently used this body of knowledge to establish their administrative machinery. Said traces the origins of this discourse to the confrontations between Islam and Christendom in the middle ages, to which additions were made from the sciences of philology and history and also by the writings of figures such as Barthelemy Herbelot, Silvester de Sacy and Ernest Renan. These Orientalists and their followers confirmed and elaborated upon stereotypes of the orientals as passive, irrational, authoritarian and so on.

The third chapter which is titled "Orientalism Now", argues that the tradition of British and French Orientalism were adopted by the United States. Orientalism can be found in current Western depictions of "Arab" cultures. The
depictions of the Arab as irrational, menacing, untrustworthy and anti-western are ideas into which Orientalist scholarship has evolved. These notions are trusted as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by the Occident. Today, Said argues, some Orientalists feel betrayed by the modern "disorientals", no longer true to the values assigned to them by the Western cultural synthesis. Some scholars, like Bernard Lewis, now see the Orient as an imitation of West with no other option but to adapt fully to western norms and to behave accordingly. Other scholars similarly guilty are Morroe Berger, Gustav Von Grunebaum, Manfred Halpern, Raphael Patai and many others, including Arab and Muslim scholars who have studied at Western universities and have become unwittingly brainwashed. All of these scholars tend to view the Arabs as decadent in terms of their classical culture, and obstreperous as moderns. "If in the meantime" Said suggests, "the Arabs, the Muslims, or the Third or Fourth worlds go unexpected ways after all, we will not be surprised to have an Orientalist tell us that this testifies to the incorrigibility of Orientals and therefore proves that they
are not to be trusted". (Said, *Orientalism* 310).

Although Said’s *Orientalism* is a much celebrated work, critics have exposed many deep-rooted ambivalences in its arguments. These ambivalences are explained primarily in terms of Said’s attempt to combine the anti-humanism of Foucault, with the traditional humanist scholarship represented by figures like Auerbach. Another set of contradictions were identified in Said’s attempt to marry together the Marxist tradition of cultural analysis with its realistic epistemology and concept of power with poststructuralist theory which emphasises discourse and language as the prime constitutive factors of social reality. Critics like Clifford James, Robert Young, Aijaz Ahmad and Bart-Moore Gilbert observe that Said fails to synthesise these various methods of cultural analysis, each with its own epistemology and political assumptions.

At various moments in his book Said is led to argue that all cultural definitions must be restrictive, that all knowledge is both powerful and fictional, that all language distorts. He suggests that “authenticity”, “experience”, “reality”,
"presence" are mere rhetorical conventions. While discussing the nature of language and truth Said approvingly quotes Nietzsche:

A mobile army of metaphors and metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.

(Said, *Orientalism* 203)

But while he cites Nietzsche and Foucault, at the same time Said makes frequent appeals to a realistic epistemology. Frequently he is led to argue that a text or tradition distorts, or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient. Elsewhere, however, he denies the existence of any "real Orient". At certain moments Said follows the logic of discourse theory, in his contention that the Orient constructed by Orientalism is not an objective or reliable representation of the "real" East as an essentially imagined or
constructed space:

The methodological failures of Orientalism cannot be accounted for either by saying that the *real* Orient is different from portraits of it or saying that since Orientalists are Westerners for the most part, they cannot be expected to have an inner sense of what the Orient is all about. Both of these propositions are false. It is not the thesis of this book to suggest that there is such a thing as a real or true Orient (Islam, Arab or whatever): nor is it to make an assertion about the necessary privilege of an “insider” perspective over an “outsider” one, to use Robert K. Merton’s useful distinction. On the contrary I have been arguing that “the orient” is itself a constituted entity, and that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically “different” inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea. (Said, *Orientalism* 322)
On the other hand, Said also claims that the West has, in fact, consistently misrepresented the Orient thus conceiving of it as a real place which is independent of and prior to its representation by the West. From this perspective Orientalist discourse is to be understood as a form of ideological knowledge in the traditional sense, which could in theory be corrected.

Said gives us three loose meanings of the term Orientalism. As Clifford James has observed these three definitions are mutually incompatible (208). First, Orientalism is what Orientalists do and have done. An Orientalist is:

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient--and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist--either in its specific or in its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (*Orientalism* 2).

In this sense, Orientalism is an academic area of knowledge. But in the second definition, it becomes a
trans-historical mindset exceeding academic boundaries and covering different epochs:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the "Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident". Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind", destiny and so on. This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx. (*Orientalism 3*)

Finally Orientalism is defined as a corporate institution having its starting point in the late eighteenth century:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a roughly
defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as the Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. *(Orientalism 3)*

In the first and third of Said's definitions, Orientalism is concerned with something called the Orient, while in the second the Orient exists merely as the construct of a questionable mental operation. This ambivalence informs much of Said's argument.

Frequently he is led to argue that a text or tradition distorts or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient. Elsewhere, however, he denies the existence of any "real orient". James Clifford puts it thus:

Orientalist inauthenticity is not answered by any authenticity. Yet Said's concept of
"discourse" still vacillates between, on the one hand, the status of an ideological distortion of lives and cultures which are never concretised and, on the other hand, the condition of a persistent structure of signifiers which, like some extreme example of surrealist writing, refers solely and endlessly to itself. (209)

Although Said's *Orientalism* is a much publicised and the key text in analysing the colonial discourses, colonial discourses and Orientalism do not mean the same thing. They are not interchangeable terms. Colonial discourses are more complex and variable than Said's model of Orientalism. Said's *Orientalism* is a study of how the Western colonial powers Britain and France represented the North African and Middle Eastern regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the outset itself we must point out that Said draws upon other historical moments as well. Orientalism refers to the sum of the West's representations of the Orient. In *Orientalism* Said notes that Orientalism survives today in
the western media report of eastern, especially Arab lands even after formal decolonisation of these countries. This points to the fact that postcolonial predicament has two dimensions: the first is that the colonial period has given us both the evidence and the theories that select and connect them, and second, that decolonisation does not entail immediate escape from colonial discourse. This reinforces the point made previously that the machinery of colonialism does not disappear as soon as the colonies become independent.

Fundamental to the view asserted by Orientalism is the binary division it makes between Orient and Occident. Each is assumed to exist in opposition to the other. Orient is conceived as being everything that the West is not. However, this is not an opposition of equal partners. The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms that serve to promote a view of the West’s superiority and strength. The West occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its “other” in a subservient position. Orientalism in fact, reveals more about those that describe the Orient than the peoples and places that are being described. The representation of other
cultures invariably entails the presentation of self-portraits. Said stresses in the introduction to *Orientalism* that Orient has been fundamental in defining the West "as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (*Orientalism* 2). The West comes to know itself by proclaiming via Orientalism in a negative way. European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate self.

It is important to note that Orientalism is a Western fantasy. Western views of the orient are not based on what is observed in the Oriental lands. But they are often the result of western fantasies. Orientalism is a fabricated construct, a series of images that comes to stand as the Orient's reality for those in the West. It is not an inert fact of nature but man-made and the creation of those who presume to rule. So Orientalism imposes upon the Orient the western views of its reality. Though Orientalism is the stuff of fantasy and the product of imagination, in its effect it is not removed from the world. Oriental constructs are pure products of imagination but they affect the people of the Occident and
they are taken as hard facts.

Orientalism becomes an institution as these fantasies find their way into an institutional structure where opinions and views about the Orient circulate as objective knowledge, wholly reliable truths. Edward Said claims that the Orient becomes an object "suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character" (Orientalism 7-8). Here we find the Western project of Enlightenment that aimed to secure the progress of humanity through the development of scientific and other objective knowledges. Orientalism is ingrained in the imagination and institutions of daily life in the west. Orientalism influences a multitude of literary and non-literary writings—philology, lexicography, history, biology, political and economic theory, novel writing and lyric poetry. These various kinds of writings are all influenced
by the structures, assumptions and stereotypes of Orientalism. Thus Orientalism is a broad system of representation bound to a structure of political domination. These representations function to justify the propriety of western imperialism. Orientalism is an indispensable and significant tool of the Empire. It legitimates the domination of other peoples and the imperialistic political and judicial structures which maintain colonial rule through physical coercion.

In order to emphasise the connection between imaginative assumptions of Orientalism and its material effects, Said divides Orientalism into latent and manifest Orientalism. Latent Orientalism stands for the dreams and fantasies about the Orient and they remain relatively constant over time. Manifest Orientalism refers to the many examples of Orientalist knowledge produced at different historical junctions. Manifest Orientalism will be different due to historical specifics and individual perspective. But latent premise will always be the same.

Although Said finds "Orientalism" in Homer, Aeschylus and Dante, he situates its modern origins in
Barthelemy d’Herblot’s *Bibliotheque Orientale*. This compendium of oriental knowledge is criticised by Said for its cosmological scope and for its construction as a “systematic” and rational Oriental panorama. Said’s central task is to describe retrospectively and continuously the structures of an Orientalism which achieved its classical form in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Said’s two criticisms of d’Herblot are constitutive of his object. Orientalism is always too broadly and abstractly pitched. It is always overly systematic. Said examines a broad range of authors, institutions and experiences. There are analyses of Sylvester de Sacy, Ernest Renan, the Indian journalism of Marx, the Oriental voyages of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, Flaubert and others. This ensemble is designed to emphasise the systematic and invariant nature of Orientalist discourse.

Said’s thesis is that the essential aspect of modern Orientalist theory and praxis can be understood not as a sudden access of objective knowledge about the Orient but as a set of structures inherited from the past and reformed in such disciplines as philology. In the form of new texts and
ideas the East was accommodated to these structures. If we see the Napoleonic expedition as a sort of first experience of modern Orientalism, we can consider its inaugural heroes as Sylvester de Sacy, Ernest Renan and Edward Lane. They are the builders of this field and creators of a tradition. What Sacy, Renan and Lane did was to place Orientalism on a scientific and rational basis. This entailed not only their own exemplary work but also the creation of a vocabulary and ideas that could be used impersonally by anyone who wished to become an Orientalist.

The two great themes of Sylvester de Sacy’s life are heroic effort and a dedicated sense of pedagogic and rational utility (Orientalism 123). He was a teacher of Arabic, Syriac and Chaldean. Arabic in particular was the language that opened the Orient to him. For, it was in Arabic that Oriental material both sacred and profane was to be found in its oldest and most instructive form. Throughout his long and distinguished career, his name was associated with the restructuring and reforming of education in post-revolutionary France. Sacy’s name is associated with modern Orientalism.
because his work virtually put before the profession, an entire systematic body of text, a pedagogic practice, a scholarly tradition and an important link between Oriental scholarship and public policy.

All of Sacy’s work is essentially compilatory. Apart from *The Principles of General Grammar* he produced *Chrestomathie Arabe*. Later in his life Sacy was chosen by Napoleon to form a *Tableau Generale* on the state and progress of arts and sciences since 1789. The importance of *Tableau Historica* is that it gives an understanding of Orientalism’s inaugural phase. Sacy’s anthologies were used very widely in Europe for several generations. Sacy’s work canonizes the Orient: it begets a canon of textual objects.

The difference between Sacy and Renan is the difference between inauguration and continuity. Renan came to Orientalism from philology and it is the extraordinary rich and celebrated cultural position of that discipline that endowed Orientalism with its most important technical characteristic. Renan had a strong guild sense as professional scholar, a professional Orientalist. In fact, a sense that put
distance between himself and the masses (Orientalism 134).

Orientalism succeeds in isolating and discrediting an array of Oriental Stereotypes; the eternal and unchanging East, the sexually insatiable Arab, corrupt despotism, mythical religiosity, Orient is strange, Oriental peoples represent racial stereotypes, Orient is feminine, Oriental despotism, Orient is degenerate and so on.

West was considered a place of historical progress and scientific development. But the Orient was considered eternal and unchanging in the sense it is remote from the influence of historical change. It is believed that the Orient is trapped in antiquity. Enlightenment made no impingement on the Orient. Conceived in this way by the West the orient was often considered as primitive or backward. A traveller from the West thinks that he is moving not only in space from one location to the other, but they are travelling back in time to an earlier world.

The Orient is accused of insatiable sex, pointing out the Arabs and Negroes, for their excessive sexual power
and thirst. Similarly, popular gender stereotypes circulated such as the effeminate Oriental male or the sexually promiscuous, exotic Oriental female. The exoticised Oriental female, often depicted nude or partially clothed in hundreds of Western works of art during the colonial period, was presented as an immodest, active creature of sexual pleasure who held the key to a number of mysterious erotic delights. Oriental is presumed as failing to live up to received gender codes: men by western standards are meant to be active, courageous and strong, by the same token women are meant to be passive, moral and chaste. The Oriental men and women do not comply with this standard code.

Crucial to Orientalism was the view that the Orient is peculiar and different. The Orient is not just different, it is oddly different, exotic, fantastic, and bizarre. This oddness, though a matter of marvel and curiosity, was considered evidence enough of the Orient’s inferiority. If the Occident was rational, sensible and familiar, the Orient was irrational, extraordinary and abnormal.
In the Western representations Oriental people often appeared as examples of various racial stereotypes such as the violent and murderous Arab, the lazy Indian and the inscrutable Chinaman. The Oriental race somehow summed up what kind of person he or she was likely to be despite their individual qualities and feelings. The Orient was where those in the West would encounter races, considered inferior to them. This confirmed the West’s sense of itself as inherently superior and more civil.

In addition to the gendering of individuals there is the more general gendering of the opposition of the Occident and Orient. In Oriental discourses East as a whole is feminised, deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting. The West becomes masculine; that is, active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic.

The corruption and degeneration of Orient is another stereotype. The Oriental stereotypes fixed typical weaknesses as cowardliness, laziness, untrustworthiness, fickleness, laxity, violence and lust. The Orient is fully corrupt and it is a
corrupting influence on the West. One and all of the early 
company officials were charged with corruption but this 
corruption was explained as an influence of the East. Yet 
another stereotype is Oriental despotism which is placed in 
contrast to European sense of justice, democracy and liberal-

An objection of Orientalism has always been that it 
provides no alternative to the phenomenon which it criticises. 
Said refuses to be drawn into this argument on the ground 
that there is no reason why there should be an alternative at 
all. Said’s refusal to offer an alternative to Orientalism does 
not solve the problem of how Said separates himself from the 
coercive structures of knowledge that he is describing. He 
lacks in a method by which he escapes the terms of his own 
critique. The absence of such a method constitutes the sig-
nificant lacuna of the book, with the result that in many cases 
Said finds himself repeating the very structures that he 
censures. Robert Young in White Mythologies points 
out(128) that this problem can be seen to be more serious in 
a general level in relation to the whole project of the book in
which, according to the logic of Said's own argument, any account of Orientalism as an object, discursive or otherwise will both repeat the essentialism that he condemns and more problematically, will itself create a representation that cannot be identical to the object it identifies. In other words, Said's accounts will be no truer to Orientalism than Orientalism is to actual Orient assuming there could ever be such a thing. Typical of this kind of difficulty would be his criticism that Orientalism created an eternal unchanging vision of Orient thus essentialising Orientalism despite his opposition to essentialism. In the same way he criticises the early Orientalists for their tendency to de-historicise the Orient by presenting it in terms of "vision" rather than through the narratives of history, but then goes on to praise Auerbach for his ability to write a general history of Western culture that achieves true vision. (Said, Orientalism 259)

As Rosane Rocher observes:

Edward Said's sweeping and passionate indictment of Orientalist scholarship as part and parcel of an imperialist, subjugating enterprise
does to Orientalist scholarship what it accuses Orientalist scholarship of having done to the countries east of Europe: it creates a single discourse, undifferentiated in space and across political, social and intellectual identities. Written primarily with the Middle East and Islam in view, it includes India and Hinduism by a dittoing procedure founded on sparse documentation. By failing to examine German Scholarship— the predominant branch of Indology through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it shies way from confronting the crucial issue of what may be attributable to colonial conditions and what may not. By collapsing the entire history of Orientalism into a consistent discourse, it leaves in the shadows the precise relations between the genesis and uses of particular forms of knowledge and their immediate historical environments. In doing so, it obscures the more central issue of the
intricate dialectics between the pursuit of knowledge and governmental pursuits, an issue that is not restricted to Orientalist knowledge and imperial governments, but one that every scholar must face. (215)

Before providing any counter description to Orientalism or other comparable forms of colonialism, the problems of critic’s own methodology must be addressed if he or she is to do anything more than simply repeat the structures that are being criticised. In “Orientalism Reconsidered” (1984) Said admits that the question that remains unanswered in this book is “how the production of knowledge best serves communal as opposed to factional, ends how knowledge that is non-dominating and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power” (Orientalism 50)

Said’s most significant argument about the discursive condition of knowledge is that the texts of Orientalism “create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe”. (Orientalism 94)

At the same time his most important political claim is
that as a system of learning about the Orient, Orientalism has close ties to enabling socio-economic and political institutions to the extent that it can be seen to have justified colonialism in advance as well as subsequently facilitating its successful operation. This poses a major theoretical problem. On the one hand, he suggests that Orientalism merely consists of a representation that has nothing to do with the "real" Orient, denying any correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient. On the other hand, he argues that its knowledge was put in the service of colonial conquest, occupation and administration. This means that at a certain moment, Orientalism as representation did have to encounter the actual conditions of what was there and it showed itself as effective as a form of power or knowledge. This means that Orientalism is not just a representation. It provided the necessary knowledge for actual colonial conquest.

The major criticism of *Orientalism* from which several of others stem is the accusation that it is ahistorical. Said's examples of Orientalist writing range from the Italian poet Dante writing in the early fourteenth century up to twentieth
century. It implies that the Western discourse on the Orient over several centuries has a unity derived from a common and continuing experience of fascination and threat from the East. Said’s account glosses over the variable factors that make the historical moment unique such as the contrasting economic and social circumstances of different territories in different points of time.

The use of the term “discourse” in Said’s work is already highly problematic. While he derives the term from Foucault, Said’s usage is very different. As Aijaz Ahmed (In Theory 145-46) reminds us, when Foucault uses the term “discourse” in dealing with a Western episteme he presumes the presence of modern state forms and institutional grids that arrives between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Said seems at points to refer to a singular trans-historical Orientalist discourse, tracing it back to ancient Greek theatre, that really essentialises the West to a considerable extent.

Ahmad challenges not only the claimed originality of many of Said’s ideas, but also how his ahistorical treatment of ideas and concepts leads him to all types of self
contradictions. Said’s ignorance of and even antipathy to Marxism is more evident in his indifference to history in the matter of ideas and concepts much more than in his chosen distancing from Marxist methodology.

Said’s ahistorical or even tran-historical treatment of authors and ideas even reduces colonialism to a “style” or “form” rather than hard economic and political oppression and reality. Ahmad says:

The ‘Orientlist discourse’ has already been set in motion, then, in the earliest of the Athenian tragedies, not in general but in the specific regularities which will henceforth determine its structure: Asia’s loss, Europe’s victory; Asia’s muteness, Europe’s mastery of discourse; Asia’s inability to represent itself in accordance with its own authority. The terms are set, and there is little that later centuries will contribute to the essential structure, though they will doubtless proliferate the discourse in enormous quantities. As Said puts it: “It is as if, having once settled on
the Orient as a locale suitable for incarnating the infinite in a finite shape Europe could not stop the practice”. […] Said remarks at one point that Orientalism “delivered” the Orient to colonialism, so that colonialism begins to appear as a product of Orientalism itself—indeed, as the realization of the project already inherent in Europe’s perennial project of inferiorising the Orient first in discourse and then in colonisation.

This is, of course, doubly paradoxical, since Said is vehement in his criticism of ‘Orientalism’ for its highly ‘textual’ attitude, yet in his own account imperialist ideology itself appears to be an effect mainly of certain kinds of writing. (In Theory, 180-181)

It is arguable that a pessimistic view of resistance predominates in Orientalism. This is another major criticism of Orientalism. In Orientalism Said proposes a model of colonial political relations in which all power lies with the coloniser. This imperial discourse operated with very little
opposition on the part of the Orient. This leaves Orientalist discourse free from any resistance from the Orient. If Said’s description is taken for its face value, Orientalism moves in one direction from the active West to the passive East. He rarely examines how Oriental peoples received these representations, or how these representations circulated in the colonies themselves. In the words of Aijaz Ahmad, Said never thinks about how western representations “might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonised countries (In Theory 172). But Said points out that Orientalism generally promotes an idea of the colonized subject as passive, silent and incapable of resistance. In “Orientalism Reconsidered” Said answers the charge of non resistance by the colonised by arguing that it is largely irrelevant. Recognising that what for the most part got left out of Orientalism was precisely the very history that resisted its ideological as well as political encroachments, Said, nonetheless justifies his approach in Orientalism by reminding the readers that his focus was on western discourses
of subject peoples: consequently he repeats his earlier argument that in imperial discourse the Orient was not Europe's interlocutor but its silent other.

According to Said “every European in what he could say about the Orient was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric” (Orientalism 204) Said’s pessimistic perspective of the operations of power in colonial situation leads him to take an insufficient account of resistance within imperial culture itself. He suggests that even those who were critical of colonial hegemony cannot escape the influence of Orientalist assumptions.

Said, after quoting a long passage from Marx’s article “British Rule in India” comes to the conclusion that Marx equated colonialism with progress.

The passage in question is quoted below:

Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual
members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilisation and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies...England it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. (in *Said Orientalism* 153)
After quoting this long passage, instead of suggesting that Marx’s analysis might be contradictory, Said closes all conflict down with the remark: “yet in the end it is the Romantic-Orientlist vision that wins out”(154) He draws unsurprising conclusions that Marx equated colonialism with progress and that Europe is the unconscious tool of progress in India. This is the traditional view of the critics of Marx. Said in no way indicates any awareness that Marx and Engels wrote much else which contradicts this one sided view. Aijaz Ahmad says:

It is always very convenient to quote one or two journalistic flourishes from those two dispatches on India which Marx wrote for New York Tribune in 1853 and which are the most anthologized on this topic ‘The British Rule in India’ and ‘The Future Results of British Rule in India’ That Said would quote the most quoted passage, the famous one on ‘unconscious tool’ is predictable and there is no evidence in Orientalism that he has come to regard this as a
representative passage, after considerable engagement with Marx's many and highly complex writings on colonialism as such and on the encounter between capitalist and non-capitalist societies (In Theory 222)

The Marxist tradition has been notably anti-imperialist. The Marxists all over the world has been in the forefront of anti-imperialist struggle. It is equally true that Marx's denunciation of pre colonial societies in India is no more strident than his denunciations of Europe's own feudal past or the absolute monarchies.

Marx's statement to the effect that the replacement of village society by industrial society is historically necessary and therefore objectively progressive, is by no means discourse of Orientalism. This position stems logically and necessarily from positions Marx held on issues of class and modes of production.

Said's humanist perspective do not harmonise with his use of methods derived from Foucault who is of course a radical critic of humanism. But, however variant and inconsistent its appeals, Orientalism is one of the first attempts to use Foucault in an extended cultural analysis. But Foucault
is not easily imitated. Foucault’s work will not occupy any permanent ground but must attack, pervert and transgress the grounds of truth and meaning wherever they become formulated institutionally. It is rather difficult however to qualify Foucault’s restless activity on behalf of the excluded, against all totalising, defining, essentialising alliance of knowledge and power. Said in his work deploys adversary theoretical models derived from Foucault and Gramsci. A key political term for Said is “oppositional” and it is fairly clear what this means in the limited context of a book like *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* writes back at an imperial discourse from the position of an Oriental whose actuality has been denied. It is apparent that a wide range of western humanist assumptions escape Said’s oppositional analysis as do the discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anti-colonial and particularly nationalist movements. Said’s account of how Orientalists have represented or misrepresented Islam is a prominent thread running through the length of *Orientalism*. The Orientalists such as Sacy and Renan, Edward Lane and Francois Rene Chateaubriand, Richard Burton and T.E
Lawrence are compared and contrasted. His representation of these Orientalists reveals much about his view of Islam and religion. The Orientalist representation of Arabs is one pillar of Said’s account, then the representation of Islam is the other. For good or ill Islam is regarded as a constitutive feature of Arab and Oriental identity. For pragmatic reasons Said accepts this association. So he feels compelled to defend Islam and thus Arab and Orientals against the misrepresentations of the Orientalists. Orientalism is Said’s guerilla campaign against Christian, European and western representations of Islam. Much of this campaign deals with the construction of the prophet as an imposter or with Islam as a threat to the west. He takes Dante to task for his depiction of the Prophet whom he relegates to the Ninth circle of hell. The Prophet is depicted as more sinful than blasphemers, heretics, sensualists and gluttons, more sinful than suicidal, avaricious and wrathful people.

Western theories of Asia reflect to an important extent power relations between Western and Asian societies and this connection calls for critical reflection. We are ready to
accept fully that western knowledge about the Orient in the post Enlightenment period was as Said argues, “a systematic discourse by which Europe was able to manage-and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively”. (Orientalism 3)

Such an argument portrays the production of knowledge about the Orient as an exclusively Western affair. European and later American views created a reality in which Orientals had to live, according to Said. Although we have to admit that it is a forceful vision, it is also surely a misleading one. It is itself a product of Orientalism, since it neglects the important ways in which the so called Orientals not only have shaped their own world but also the Orientalist views criticised by Said. It would be a serious mistake to deny agency to the colonised in our effort to show the force of colonial discourse.

According to David Ludden Orientalism in not just the moribund legacy of colonialism that Said makes it out to be. In the transition from empire to nation it attained new authority and vitality. In the case of India, by 1880s it had
entered the nationalist discourse. From Ram Mohun Roy to Ravindranath Tagore, Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, Orientalism as a body of knowledge informed the discourse of India’s nationhood. For political discourse on both sides of the colonial divide entail the other. Each side defined in relation to the other. Orientalism became a versatile component of national discourse, an authoritative base for India’s self definition. Both sides were secure in the knowledge that village India had survived into modern times from ancient days, by its autonomous reproduction within a religiously prescribed caste society.

The role of Orientalism in nationalism has not been studied adequately. But it seems evident that being grounded in a formulation of India in relation to Europe, Orientalism contained vital elements for constructing national identity in India and Britain alike. Meaning and content of Indian “otherness” would be contested by nationalists, as they had been seen by William Jones and James Mill. Foundational ideas established in early colonial decades such as the religious basis of India’s social order could be powerfully
deployed for opposing purposes. Empire also generated knowledge that could be used to defend Indian tradition. Orientalists like Max Muller built a body of text to document the grandeur of Indian culture. At this juncture Dadabhai Naoroji and Ramesh Chandra Dutt began to nationalise Orientalism by positing a British imperial assault on traditional India, employing colonial knowledge to criticise the Raj for impoverishing India. Gandhiji’s idea of Swaraj with its ageless rural simplicity and moral continuity came from Orientalism. Nehru’s *Discovery of India* is a more systematic use of Orientalism to craft a chapter of nationhood. Nehru discovers a wise and ageless Indian nation invaded, conquered and exploited over centuries of foreign rule, but still surviving in the essence of its traditions. Ludden says:

> In nationalism we find the vitality of orientalism today. This conclusion is at odds with Said and suggests that his work inhabits a place inside the history of Orientalism. For to imply as he does, that Orientalism sustains a body of false colonial image of the East and its peoples leave
us with the implicit promise that a true image would be constructed if these people were free to render images of themselves. [...] By presuming that there is to be found in the East a real truth about its self-existent people, Said employs the very positivist logic that gives Orientalism life and behind his back, nationalism has claimed authority over this truth and appropriated Orientalism in the name of national self-representation. (Ludden 271).

Colonialist discourse about India is based largely on a politics of difference. It focuses on the essential differences between East and West, and within India between castes and between religious communities. In its analysis of Indian society it relies heavily on Brahmanical discourse about caste and kingship that provides a negative counter image for the self perception of the "Enlightened" West. It is a discourse that legitimates colonial rule but as we shall see it continues to exert a considerable influence on the sociological understanding of India after independence.
A major element in Orientalist discourse about India is the essentialisation of difference between Hindus and Muslims. This essentialisation is certainly not a colonial invention, since it depends on essentialising features of Hindu discourses about the Muslim others and of Muslim discourses about the Hindu others. In the colonial period however, these indigenous discourses were transformed under the influence of Orientalism to support the imagination of the religious community as a nation. It is here we find the role of the imperialist rulers in promoting violent antagonism between Hindus and Muslims.