Chapter I

Culture, Travel and Imperialism

Asia Subordinated

The Victorian period, long seen in the West as a time of universal progress, was experienced by Asia, South Asia, Africa and by Latin American countries as a devastating catastrophe. These geopolitical and cultural spaces were not only politically and economically subjugated; their cultural, intellectual, and spiritual life was also disrupted and maligned by the different European colonial powers. Foreign soldiers and business monopolists tore apart the great countries and cultures that had once formed the heart of civilization. As the British colonists gunned down the last heirs to the Mughal Empire in 1857, destroyed the Summer Palace in Beijing, or humiliated the bankrupt rulers of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, it became clear that the world would never be the same again for these cultures and societies. Predatory colonialism and imperialism fueled by profit-hungry capitalism exploited the natural resources of these colonized countries. It monopolized their economies and brought them forcefully into the fluid and uncertain world of capitalism dominated by the protectionist economic and political policies of European imperial powers. Their ways of life, thinking, feeling and their structures of thought were variously changed, disrupted, revolutionized, decimated, creolized, and finally dominated.

In May 1798, Napoleon, along with 40,000 - strong French arm, invaded the great North African country, Egypt. In her scramble for Africa and to outwit Britain, as Pankaj Mishra has argued in his intellectual history of decolonization, *From the Ruins of Empire,* France needed colonies in order to prosper, as its foreign minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand believed, and a presence in Egypt would not only compensate the French for their loss of territory in
North America, it would also pose a serious challenge to the British East India Company, which produced highly profitable cash crops in its Indian Possessions. (15)

Napoleon had hoped that the French control of Egypt could tip the balance of power in African territories in favor of France and against the British in India, while also stopping the Russians, who eyed the Ottoman Empire. Apart from France’s geopolitical concerns, he cherished his own personal desire of conquering the Orient. “Great reputations”, he was convinced, “are only made in the Orient; Europe is too small” (Mishra 15). Napoleon decorated his expedition with a huge number of scholars and persons belonging to different disciplines and practices of knowledge. A large contingent of scientists, philosophers, philologists, artists, musicians, astronomers, architects, surveyors, zoologists, printers and engineers accompanied him to Egypt, thereby linking politics, power and knowledge in order to make his imperial designs palatable to his own people and to the people of Egypt. They created a body of knowledge about Egypt, an Oriental space, by “making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, Orientalism 3). This body of knowledge not only justified Napoleon’s Oriental expedition, but it also created an ideological framework of reference for future imperial journeys in and around Africa and other Asian countries. All this was meant to record the dawn of European Enlightenment and universal civilization in the ontological and epistemological backward East. Napoleon knew that his Egyptian enterprise and conquest would have immeasurable effects on civilization and commerce of the world. He even tried to make Egyptians and Muslims believe that he possessed the highest admiration for the Prophet of Islam and Islam. Like a typical colonizer he also created an ideological gloss over his manifestly colonial enterprise.

According to Mishra:
Indeed the French, he claimed, were also Muslims, by virtue of their rejection of the Christian Trinity. He also made some noises – familiar to us after two centuries of imperial wars disguised as humanitarian interventions – about delivering the Egyptians from their despotic masters. (16)

In July 1798, the French army overcame all the military opposition and routed any resistance on the part of the ruling Mamluks and their overlords in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. They could not withstand the war-hardened French soldiers who outnumbered them and were also backed by the latest military technology and arms. Though for his own imperial ideological reasons he was always keen to express his admiration for Islam, still the Egyptian cleric and scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarati described Napoleon’s colonial adventure as . . . great battles, terrible events, disastrous facts, calamities, unhappiness, sufferings, persecution, upsets in the order of things, terror, revolutions, disorders, devastations – in a word, the beginning of a series of great misfortunes. (Mostyn 18)

This momentous historical event set the tone and tenor for several such other encounters between ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Western Civilization’. Al-Jabarati’s reaction to the fall of Egypt under the weight of European imperial powers will be repeated again and again by colonized people from Morocco to Java, Algeria, Libya, Middle East, India, China and Japan. On the other side of the colonial divide and throughout the nineteenth century, European writers, philosophers, travelers, scientists, statesmen and administrators would express an idea of ‘Europe’ as a place of universal progress, science, civilization, culture human rights, liberty, equality, freedom and democracy. This idea emerged from the American and French revolutions and seemed to place the West in the bandwagon of the progress.
Europe’s encounter with India in the modern period began with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498. Over subsequent centuries European powers, and especially Britain with the help of superior naval power and profit-hungry East India Company, tightened their colonial grip over Indian territories by defeating one princely state after another. The original desire for the monopoly of the spice trade changed in a hundred years to the import into Europe of textiles, tea, and other goods, which again, according to K. M. Panikar, “changed after the Industrial Revolution in Britain into an urge to find markets for European manufactured goods and finally for the investment of capital” (Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance 13). He further maintains that

Originally confined to trade, European interests became in the nineteenth century predominantly political over many years. The leadership of European peoples in this period also underwent change. From Portugal the supremacy in trade was wrested by the Dutch. In the middle of the eighteenth century Britain and France contested for it for a short time. Since then, the authority of Britain was never seriously challenged till the beginning of the Second World War. (13)

The British rule on the land mass of India was steadily and firmly established by disintegrating the ailing Mughal Empire which formally ended in 1857 when ‘the last Mughal’ Bahadur Shah Zafar II was exiled to Rangoon. On 14 September 1857, the British assaulted and took the capital city of Mughal Empire and, according to William Dalrymple, “sacking and looting the Mughal Capital, and massacring great swathes of the population” (Dalrymple 4). Dalrymple quotes Edward Vibart, a nineteen-year old British Officer, as having recorded that

The orders went out to shoot every soul. It was literally murder . . .
I have seen many bloody and awful sights lately but such a one as I witnessed yesterday I pray I never see again. The women were all
spared but their screams, on seeing their husbands and sons
butchered, were most painful . . . hard must be that man’s heart I
think who can look o with indifference . . . (Dalrymple 4)

In his life time Zafar had seen his own dynasty reduced to humiliating
insignificance, while the British transformed themselves from vulnerable traders
into an aggressively expansionist military power. From one corner of India to
another, the British had, in the course of a hundred years of warfare, established
their formidable power. Those kingdoms like Kashmir, Hyderabad, Travancore,
and the Rajput States which were permitted to exist, had been turned into
dependent territories, isolated and politically and economically powerless against
the authority of the British. Panikkar says that “the Company felt itself to be the
undisputed master of India, and under Lord Dalhousie set itself to the task of
building up a modern unified administration” (Panikkar 82). The British
subsequently controlled and ruthlessly exploited economically all the major
strategically important areas of India. The British colonization of India
inaugurated a potent presence in mainland Asia “that was to help them force open
China to European traders, and turn the rest of Asia into a European dependency”
(Mishra 23).

The predicament caused by the Western-style capitalism and imperialism
in countries as different as Egypt, Turkey, China and India, and the subsequent
economic exploitation, did not even leave the culture of these places insulated
from the larger social and economic changes unleashed by the British. In general,
growing technological power and commercial success were making the British
change their opinions of India. Far from being considered as the abode of
civilization, India was viewed as a backward place. Its cultures, languages,
philosophies and religions began to be treated as products of an under-developed
and superstitious mind. This imperial hubris was given best vent by Lord Thomas
Macaulay in his now infamous ‘Minutes on Indian Education’ (1835) in which he
declared, from the vantage point of a colonial edifice, that all the literature and
culture of Arabia and India is not equal to the one shelf of European books. It is in this vein that he expresses his colonial plan to restructure the mental makeups of ‘barbaric Indians’:

We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, words and intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of this country . . . . (Ashcroft et. al. 431)

That would be the White Man’s burden in India in particular and the world in general. This infantilizing and rude attitude towards India and its people informed the policies of the British colonial administrators. The British indifference to Indian society and culture was best expressed by Edmund Burke and Indian historian Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai. Burke, then a member of British Parliament, had observed that

Young men (boys almost) govern there without a society and without sympathy with the natives . . . they roll one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage. (Edmund Burke 453)

Similarly, Tabatabai maintained that “no love, and no coalition can take root between the conquerors and the conquered” (qtd in Mishra 24). Haji Mustapha, a convert to Islam who translated Tabatabai’s book into English, concurred with Tabatabai. According to him, “the general turn of the English individuals in India seems to be a thorough contempt for the Indians (as a national body). It is taken to be no better than a dead stock that may be worked upon without much consideration and at pleasure” (ibid). The British rule inflicted multifarious damage on India. Its economy and political authority was destroyed. Mohandas Gandhi reflected on this damage in his ‘Declaration of Indian
Independence’ in 1930 and stated that “Village industries, such as hand spinning, have been destroyed . . . Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to bring further burdens on the peasantry. All administrative talent is killed and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village offices and clerkships . . . the system of education has torn us from our moorings (qtd in Mishra 36).

Muslims of India suffered the most under the new imperial dispensation. They not only lost the seat of power, but their culture also suffered tremendously when the British colonial administrators replaced Persian by English as the official language. This undermined the traditional cultural world of Indian Muslims. In the new colonial setting the Muslim’s former subjects – Hindus – were favored by the new rulers as part of the divide and rule policy. As the years passed and “as Muslim prestige and learning sank, and Hindu confidence, wealth, education and power increased, Hindus and Muslims would grow gradually apart, as British policies of divide an rule found willing collaborators among the chauvinists of both faiths” (Dalrymple 484). After 1857 Muslims began to be portrayed negatively in British press and that colonial discourse continues to influence the contemporary Indian response to Indian Islamic history. Dalrymple maintains that for many Indians today

The Mughals are still perceived as it suited the British to portray them in the imperial propaganda that they taught in Indian schools after 1857: as sensual, decadent, temple-destroying invaders – something that was forcefully and depressingly demonstrated by the whole episode of the demolition of the Baburi Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992. (Dalrymple 479)

New Lords of the World

The nineteenth century saw the slow but sure fall of Asia’s three great empires under the weight of technologically and militarily strong European powers. The Chinese Qing dynasty, India’s Mughal Empire and Turkish Ottoman
Empire could not withstand the aggressive British capitalist policies backed by strong naval gunships. Almost all of Asia and Africa began to be ruled from European capitals. Their destinies were shaped in policy institutions of London and Paris. European capital cities not only became the political and economic powerhouse of the world, but also determined the tastes and values in culture and civilization as well. History itself began to be seen as European. The ideas of European enlightenment were given a center stage. Christian Europe began to be seen as the site of historical progress and rest of the world was merely treated as field for civilizational experiments. Europe finally donned the robes of civilizational mission to ‘educate’ the ‘backward’ and ‘barbaric’ cultures and peoples.

Although there have been many other imperialisms in the past, yet there was something different in the modern European Imperialism that distinguished it from previous imperial formations. As Pankaj Mishra observes in his book that “many victims of European conquests themselves belonged to powerful empires – Ottoman Turkey, Qing China. But:

Modern European Imperialism would be wholly unprecedented in creating a global hierarchy of economic, physical and cultural power through either outright conquest or ‘informal’ empires of free trade and unequal treaties. (Mishra 42)

This European colonial onslaught on Asia and Africa, where it mostly replaced Muslim rulers, left a trail of manifold social, economic and cultural disruptions in its wake. White Europeans, mostly men, became the new lords of the world and civilization came to be mainly represented by European cultural forms and traditions. Ideas of science and historical knowledge, of morality, culture, order, and even styles of dress came to be seen and defined in purely European terms. History itself became a story of the progress of Europe from one higher stage of civilization to another.
Culture, Imperialism and Structures of Feeling

Colonialism and imperialism are fundamentally very complex and varied phenomenon. However, the main battle in imperial formations has always been for the control of land and other natural resources. Empires are built to restructure societies, economies and polities of colonized populations for the benefit of metropolitan centers. Coercive state apparatuses like naval, air, and military powers are of fundamental importance for the establishment and perpetuation of unequal power relations between colonizers and colonized. Ethnic cleansing of Native Americans, Aborigines of Australia and New Zealand, and the systematic violence used by European colonizers during nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the world is enough to show that empires are built on blood and violence.

Frantz Fanon in his studies of colonialism and decolonization has made this amply clear that physical and psychological violence is at the heart of colonial processes. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, an important theoretical intervention which deals, among other things, with colonial and anticolonial violence, he maintains that the colonial world is a vertically divided space which is characterized by the “existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans” (Fanon 29). The dividing line is shown by barracks and police stations. He further argues that

In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-between, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression . . . In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counselors and ‘bewilderers’ separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of
pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native. (29)

Fanon’s original insights into the violent relationship between colonizers (‘us’) and colonized (‘them’) are corroborated by Benita Parry whose Marxist position within postcolonial studies has focused on the “material impulses to colonialism, its appropriation of physical resources, exploitation of human labour and institutional repression” (Parry 3). Contrary to the analysis of colonialism based on the ascendancy of linguistic turn within literary theory, Parry bats for a theory of imperialism that is more concerned with “the lived condition of unequal power sharing globally” (ibid). Focusing on the all too tangible violence of imperialism, Parry writes that unequal power relations and systematic violence characterized the colonial space everywhere. The circumstances of colonized populations are constituted by the larger field of power relations that are designed to dominate, exploit and rule the colonized other who is always treated as ontologically inferior being.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon analyses the psychological effects of colonialism by using Freudian and Marxist theories of alienation. Unequal social and economic realities, on the one hand, and, on the other, the positing of imperial culture and language as the civilized norm creates an inferiority complex in the subjectivity of the colonized other. According to Fanon, “If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- Primarily, economic;
- subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority (Fanon 4).

Central to Fanon’s view of the colonized mind under colonialism is the significance of language, that is culture, in the alienation of the colonized black
person, an ugly colonial process Fanon aimed at reversing via a process he called disalienation. Fanon ascribes a basic importance to the phenomenon of language of the colonizers, a cultural element which “should provide us with one of the elements in the colored man’s comprehension of the dimension of the other. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other” (8). Fanon argues that

All colonized people – in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves in relation to the civilizing language, i.e. the metropolitan culture. (2)

By ‘metropolitan culture’ Fanon mostly meant language and literature of the colonial powers. It is apparent that Fanon posits culture of the colonizers at the heart of the colonial formations and imperial processes. He suggests that culture carries the values, morality, opinions, thought processes and frame of references of the dominant power structure. In other words, culture in colonial situations becomes a site of the white man’s civilizing mission.

This aspect of the analysis of colonialism and imperialism focuses on culture as an ideological state apparatus. It posits a deep symbiotic relationship between colonial power relations and cultural forms that narrativize the colonial setting and ideology. One of the most important theoretical interventions in this vein has been that of Edward Said. Said’s writings like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* opened new vistas of understanding imperialism and its formations. He illuminated the imperial doctrine found in much Western culture and canonical texts. *Culture and Imperialism* demonstrates how, according to John Pilger, “the perceptions of colonisers and colonized are entwined by the assumptions that drove imperialism 100 years ago and drives it today” (Pilger 88). In this book Said provides a very useful guide to imperialism in its most insidious form: culture. He uses the idea of worldliness of cultural forms to show that the Western culture is deeply implicated in the sordid history of imperialism. He argues that the contours of Western culture are shaped by the single fact of
imperialism. According to him, therefore, “the job of literary analysis is, first of all, to find the signs of that (imperial) geography, the references to it in the literary work”. He adds that the

... geography, landscape, and setting are paramount. You can’t have a novel without a setting, and setting is there; it’s immediately evident. The analysis of literary work, then, in the second sense, is to elucidate the setting, which puts the work in touch with this larger historical experience of domination and being dominated, which I was talking about. (Said Power, Politics and Culture 193)

Empire and its ideological structures of domination, in other words, are written into the very fabric of imperial culture, whose main function seems to be the manufacturing of consent. Cultural forms help to create ideas conducive to the colonial center. Culture and literature creates images, codes, stereotypes and a language that in one way or the other provides legitimacy and naturalizes the coercive power relations between dominant and dominated. As Ania Loomba says that “literature, in such a reading, both reflects and creates ways of seeing and modes of articulation that are central to the colonial process. It is especially crucial to the formation of colonial discourses because it influences people as individuals” (Loomba 66).

After defining imperialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory” Edward Said goes on to say that colonial structures can be maintained not only through open brute force but also through social, economic and, most importantly, through cultural dependence. Even if colonialism ends, yet imperialism lingers where it always has been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices (Said, Culture and Imperialism 8). These practices are supported and perpetuated by different kinds of colonial discourses which are built on racist and orientalist ideas and concepts that divide the people between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’, ‘civilized’ and
‘barbaric’. The overseas domination and the cultural formations associated with create structures of feeling that give a sense of mission to the citizens of metropolitan centre. They construct ideas like ‘responsibility to protect’, ‘responsibility to bring democracy’ and ‘responsibility to civilize the barbarians’, and such colonial discourses redeem the conquest of the earth, which otherwise is a very bloody practice.

Another intervention in cultural politics, which analyzed the discursive power of colonial texts and their representations of colonized cultures and peoples, is Gauri Viswanathan’s *The Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. Viswanathan uses Antonio Gramsci’s insights regarding the relations of culture and power to argue that the introduction of English studies in India by colonial government of Britain was an ideological apparatus designed to manufacture consent through European canonical texts. The book studies “the institution, practice, and the ideology of English studies introduced in India under British colonial rule” (Viswaathan 1). The purpose behind this cultural policy was to give to colonial subjects a conviction that the colonizers are more intelligent, benevolent, humane, and progressive. It was designed to give the ‘natives’ a realization that they are ‘inferior’, ‘backward’, and in need of a ‘superior English race’ to save them from ‘barbaric’ and ‘superstitious’ cultural forms and practices. Viswanathan demonstrates that

The discipline of English came into its own in an age of colonialism . . . no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways. (2)

The role of English literature as a tool of colonial subjugation can be understood from the fact that English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in England. As
Terry Eagleton makes it clear the “era of the academic establishment of English is also the era of high imperialism in England . . . What was at stake in English studies was less English literature than English literature: our great ‘national poets’ Shakespeare and Milton, the sense of an ‘organic’ national tradition and identity to which new recruits could be admitted by the study of humane letters” (Eagleton 24). In other words one can safely state that English literary and other cultural texts like dramas, novels, epics, travelogues, essays and other expressions were used to serve and support social and political control. Culture becomes a discourse, activity, process and an institutional site where ideological battles are fought, won or lost. While reflecting on the ideological function of English literature in India, Viswanathan shows that “certain humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature – for example, the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking – were considered essential to the processes of sociopolitical control by the guardians of the same tradition” (Viswanathan 3). This makes it clear that the English colonizers used literature and culture to impart to the natives the values and aesthetic principles which were deemed ‘civilized’ by the administrators of the colonies. Culture would carry the images of morally superior and just home country, on the one hand, and, on the other, highlight the uncivilized and barbaric nature of the vanquished civilizations. This is made apparent by one of the colonial policy makers who argued that by giving young Indians a taste for the arts and literature of England

We might insensibly wean their affections from the Persian muse,
teach them to despise the barbarous splendor of their ancient princes, and, totally supplanting the tastes which flourished under the Mogul reign, make them look to this country with that veneration, which the youthful student feels for the classical soil of Greece. (qtd in Viswanathan 6)
Such policy decisions are underpinned by the common paternalistic and condescending attitude towards subjugated populations and their cultural forms. The colonized people are represented as morally and intellectually deficient as compared to the white rulers. Their attitudes, modes of thought, morality, ethics and forms of knowledge are thought to be the products of a superstitious mind. They are presented in essentialist terms as objects rather than the subjects of their own history. Their agency to make their own destiny is denied to them by the metropolitan administrator. Colonial cultural forms ranging from travelogues to music and painting create stereotypical representations of the colonized people and their civilization. They are shown to have created nothing. Their contributions to the human civilization are not counted. And most importantly, they are treated as less than human. In other words, an extreme process of dehumanization and othering works at the heart of unequal power relations that characterize the phenomenon called cultural imperialism. New social and political relationships are created, maintained or perpetuated. Older traditions and ways of living are altered beyond recognition.

Gauri Viswanathan’s study of English studies in India during colonial period makes amply clear “that the Eurocentric literary curriculum of the nineteenth century was less a statement of the superiority of the Western tradition than a vital, active instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial expansionism and military actions” (Viswanathan 167). These analyses of colonial policies and discourses strengthen Edward Said’s theoretical formulations regarding Orientalist knowledge forms. They show that the British Indian educational institutions and literary syllabus were conceived as part and parcel of the act of securing and consolidating power. Viswanathan concludes this study of relationship between culture and imperialism in the following important terms:

What I am suggesting, however, is that we can no longer afford to regard the uses to which literary works were put in the service of British imperialism as extraneous to the way these texts are to be
read. The involvement of colonialism with literary culture is too deep, too pervasive for the disciplinary development of English literary pedagogy to be studied with Britain as its only or primary focus. Large areas of discussion have yet to be fully mapped out, but I am hopeful that with sustained cross-referencing between Western culture and imperialism will be progressively illuminated.

(169)

The Kenyan novelist and essayist, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, also made an important intervention in the debate regarding the roots of imperialism in European culture. In his works like *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* and *Writers in Politics* Ngugi’s critical consciousness focused on how the West came to see itself as the centre of the universe. He argued that within colonial and neo-colonial situations cultural power, like political and economic power, is controlled at the imperial centre. In many ways he led the war against cultural imperialism in Africa. However, it was in *Decolonising the Mind* that Ngugi squarely beamed his critical light on the politics of language and culture within imperial formations. His contention is that imperialism in Africa or in the rest of the world has not ended. Rather it continues in many international economic and political policies of the rich Western countries. The “imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using multinational and of course the flag-waving native ruling classes” (Ngugi 2). Like Said and Viswanathan, Ngugi too considers culture as the biggest and potent weapon wielded by the colonial powers. It will not be out of place to quote Ngugi here in some detail to highlight the basic contention of this chapter:

> The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them to see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves
from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves . . . It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle . . . The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: ‘Theft is holy’. (3)

Travelogues and Traveling for Empire

Edward Said’s studies of colonial discourse and imperialism have been fundamental in creating critical language and paradigm within which Western culture’s investment in colonial enterprise is analyzed. His concept of worldliness of cultural forms has informed postcolonial critical practice of seeing literature and other artistic creations within the larger historical and sociopolitical framework. Said’s theoretical intervention in the field of colonial discourse studies is of paramount importance in giving significance to the immediate context within which knowledge production takes place. Following Michael Foucault and Fanon, he maintained that forms of knowledge and institutions of knowledge production cannot be divorced from the relations of power between different socioeconomic classes and colonial groups. As has been already argued in the previous section, Edward Said has made sordid history of European colonialism integral to the study of Western literature and civilization. In other words, Western modernity and enlightenment itself, Said argues, cannot be properly understood without taking into consideration the political and economic structures that informed all aspects of modern life. According to him

Texts are protean things; they are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, and these require attention and criticism. No one can take stock of everything, of course, just as no one theory can explain or account for the connections among texts and societies. But reading and writing texts are never neutral activities:
there are interests, powers, passions, pleasures entailed no matter how aesthetic and entertaining the work. Media, political economy, mass institutions – in fine, the tracings of secular power and the influence of the state – are part of what we call literature. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 385)

Said’s project bridged the gap between theory and either the ongoing or historical imperialism by highlighting the ways European culture constructed the images of the superiority of West over non-West. Colonial experience shaped both the power center and the marginalized peripheries. And it is in this context that Said said that students of

. . . literature today must from the onset take account of the politics of what they study; one cannot postpone discussions of slavery, colonialism, racism in any serious investigations of modern Indian, African, Latin and North American, Arabic, Caribbean, and Commonwealth literature. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 383)

One of many cultural forms that was and, to a large extent, still is, invested in colonial and neo-colonial projects is travelogues. Travel and accounts of the experiences of travel through British Empire proliferated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This coincided with the gradual strengthening and expansion of Western overseas colonial adventures. Travel writings described people, cultures, and traditions of colonized lands. According to Laura Franey, “Travelers’ descriptions of their relationships with small groups of Africans express metropolitan thinking about – and political and social treatment of – larger groups of Africans. The majority of the travelers . . . took active roles in the expansion of European power before, during, or soon after their travels” (Franey 3). They mapped the empire for the consumption of readers in metropolitan cities, and many “travelers fused their journey as springboards from which to engage in treaty making . . . and some travelers either worked later as colonial administrators or lobbied in Great Britain for changes in colonial governance” (ibid). Travelers
created genres of adventure stories that have been credited with helping produce a generation of Britons absolutely committed to the idea of overseas empire and willing to use force to gain British goals. Britain’s ever closer colonial contact with the wider world meant that larger and larger numbers of travelers made journeys to report upon it. Roy Bridges has argued in his essay “Exploration and travel outside Europe” that the travel writing during nineteenth century became increasingly “identified with the interests and preoccupations of those in European societies who wished to bring the non-European world into a position where it could be influenced, exploited, or in some cases, directly controlled” (Bridges 53). In order to further underline the relationship between travel writing and British colonial expansion Bridges states that

In the case of Britain, the identification was particularly close. There was some political control but more significant were various kinds of relationships stopping short of direct administration which historians have struggled to characterize by terms such as ‘informal empire’ or ‘unofficial imperialism’. Trade, diplomacy, missionary endeavor, an scientific exploration might all contribute to the British expansion and each produced its own travel writing. Increasingly European technological expertise provided advantages which made it easier to influence or dominate non-Europeans. (53)

One can even argue that the fictionalized travel narratives of writers like Joseph Conrad may have, to some extent, enabled European rule in Africa to continue by helping transform imperial rhetoric into a rhetoric that “upheld both European trusteeship in other parts of the world and the benefits of free trade over forms of economic monopoly” (Franey 68). Travel writing as an ethnographic and anthropological enterprise inscribed meanings and identities not only on the body politic of colonized spaces, but it was also an exercise in self-definition. European travelers invariably created and perpetuated stereotypical and orientalist images of the colonized world in general and Islamic world and Muslims in particular.
In the wake of publication of Said’s books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* many colonial discourse theorists undertook bath-breaking studies of travel and travel literature. These theorists like Mary Louise Pratt, Peter Hulme, Rana Kabbani, Gauri Viswanathan, Gayatri Spivak, Robert Young, and Billie Melman etc. provided critical discourse analysis of texts written by westerners about colonized countries. For them travel writing was essentially “an instrument within colonial expansion and served to reinforce colonial rule once in place” (Mills 2). They argued that travel writers of colonial period have been retailers of white and, mostly, male myths and prejudices, and their readers in imperial cities have been eager consumers of exotic and culturally othered groups. Their critical approach to travel writing has shown, according to Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, that the “travel writing frequently provides and effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to “other” cultures, peoples, and places” (Holland and Huggan VIII).

A very important text in this genre has been that of Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Pratt’s interdisciplinary approach investigates the way in which travel writing has contributed to the construction of an image of the world beyond Europe for European readership. Drawing on various critical insights from discourse analysis, anthropology, literary theory and Postcolonialism, Pratt continues the critique of eurocentrism and sociopolitical power structures associated with it. Her project in this book is to make an effort “to make the workings of imperialism, in its colonial, neocolonial and non-colonial forms, available to reflection and transformation. It is about loosening imperialism’s grip on imagination and knowledge, and creating clearings for better ways of living in knowing the world” (Pratt XII). Her book is all the more important because its analysis of travel narratives takes the late twentieth century imperial configurations into consideration. Imperial thinking and enterprises continue to renew themselves with the United States of America replacing the old British and French empires. The contemporary imperialism in the form of neoliberal globalization is spearheaded by America, which has more
than 800 military bases around the world. According to Pratt, “In the 1980s and 1990s a new phase of empire unfurled across the planet. The collapse of Soviet bloc brought a new geopolitical order and the communications revolution transformed every map of the possible” (Pratt 237). In the early twenty first century the imperially designed neoliberalism and globalization has radically restructured planetary relations in favor of Euro-American metropoles. In addition to this, rich countries like America and England have, through World Bank and International Monetary Fund, set in “motion a new wave of plunder, imposing extremely harsh social and economic conditions on the populations of weaker countries in the name of corporate profit” (238).

The continuing settler colonialism in historical Palestine coupled with American imperial military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq has renewed the old Orientalist tropes, stereotypes and images. Mainstream media in Europe and America and policy journals are again awash with the nineteenth century colonial discourse about Muslims and Islam. This phenomenon of resurgence of Orientalist discourse is particularly important because, like V. S. Naipaul’s journeys to Islamic world, Muslim spaces and cultures have always been favored destinations of travel writers from colonial capitals. Islamic Orient has always been treated by West as a civilizational foil. Europe had its most prized colonies in that part of the world. The religious and geographical nearness of the two civilizations has made the relations between the two very complicated, which otherwise cannot be explained in simple ‘us’ vs ‘them’ terms. The whole field of Orientalism has been built on this supposedly ontological distinction between ‘West’ and ‘Islam’. Islam became a perfect image of West’s ‘other’, which characterized much of colonial travel narratives about Islamic culture and society. According to Edward Said colonial traveler as an Orientalist “surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him – culture, religion, mind, history, society. To do this he must see every detail through the device of a set of reductive categories (the Semites, the Muslim, the Orient, and so forth) (Said, Orientalism 239). Such reductive and essentializing markers of
identification are still largely prevalent in the Western discussions about Islam. Policy pundits and Orientalist scholars of Islam like Bernard Lewis can still talk about ‘Muslim mind’ and ‘roots of Muslim rage’ without even winking an eye. It in this context that Said has argued that

What has not been sufficiently stressed in histories of modern anti-Semitism has been the legitimation of such atavistic designations by Orientalism, and more important for my purposes here, the way this academic and intellectual legitimation has persisted right through the modern age in discussions of Islam, the Arabs, or the Near Orient. For whereas it is no longer possible to write learned (or even popular) disquisitions on either “the Negro mind” or “the Jewish personality”, it is perfectly possible to engage in such research as “the Islamic mind” or “the Arab character” . . . (262)

The strategic importance of Islamic Orient has always been a matter of chief concern to Western imperialists. In the second half of twentieth century and in the early twenty first century the American involvement in the Middle East has increased, and this has given a renewed impetus to the use of old fashioned stereotypes about Muslims and their culture and civilization. I argue that in the contemporary era Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new forms of global empire called New World Order, headed and steered by the United States of America.

In order to underline the issues involved, and since this thesis purports to critically analyze V. S. Naipaul’s travelogues regarding Islam and Muslims, it would be apt to give an example of late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial traveler, Gertrude Bell, to one part of Islamic Orient. Bell traveled through Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) and recorded her experiences in her two major works of travel-literature, The Desert and the Sown (1907) and Amurath to Amurath (1911). Her account weaves together the historical and archeological significance of the Middle East with its contemporary
Strategic importance to British colonial adventures. Bell used her travelogues to present her opinions on how Britain should best govern the Middle Eastern areas under her rule. According to Julia Emberley “Bell’s position was entirely in keeping with prevailing colonial ideas of indirect rule with its governing strategy of granting only partial autonomy to the newly forming Arab nations while maintain British political and economic control by proxy” (Emberley 121). She built her discourse on the common nineteenth century ideology of racial difference in which Muslims of Arab world were shown to be in need of Western civilizing influence. In one of her essays ‘The basis of government in Turkish Arabia’ she argued that the Western world has progressed and produced a scientifically and administratively advanced civilization. But “the tribes of Iraq have advanced but little beyond the Moot court, and should the shaping of their destinies become our care in the future, we shall be wise to eschew any experiments tending to rush them into highly specialized institutions” (Hulme and McDougall 119). The idea of White Man’s burden clearly can be seen operating in such bold pronouncements made from the vantage point of colonial authority. The idea is that the Arab Muslims have not been able to produce cultural and institutional forms needed to live life in a modern fast changing world. Therefore, it is West’s responsibility to bring fruits of modernity and civilization to the backward and barbaric tent dwellers. At the same time one can also notice Bell’s infantilizing discourse coupled with notion of Western civilized man acting as an agent of change. As Uday Mehta has noted, “infantilisation was a foundational aspect of the liberal ideology underlying British imperial practices in colonial governance during the early twentieth century” (Emberley 123).

This chapter has constructed a theoretical framework within which Naipaul’s writings about Islam will be analyzed. It has been argued that the Victorian period, viewed in the West as a time of enlightenment and progress, was experienced by Asians in general and Muslims in particular as a devastating catastrophe. During this period most of the land mass of the world was increasingly colonized and exploited by European, and especially by British,
imperial power. Imperialism’s legitimizing colonial discourses were constructed and culture became an important site of image making and self-representation. Colonial scientists, administrators, anthropologists, philologists, writers, travelers, and cartographers, all partook in the formation of colonial discourse that justified the imperial policies as a form of civilizing mission. Culture became deeply entwined with imperialism. It created and perpetuated images, stereotypes, and rhetorical tropes to represent the colonized populations.
Works Cited


