

**Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives**  
**Dr. Santhosh R**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Week-02**  
**Lecture-08**

Orientalism and the Politics of Knowledge Production IV

Welcome back to the class. We are continuing the discussion on the introductory chapter in this very important book titled Orientalism written by Edward Said. And in the previous class, we looked at one of the three important points that he highlights in this introduction as a very, very important theoretical as well as methodological points that actually set the path for the later scholars from across the disciplines to follow. So, one of the points that we discussed yesterday was the very important critic that Said raises against this distinction between pure and political knowledge. We had a very detailed take on that particular argument where he brings forth very, very strongly the point that there is no knowledge that is completely apolitical or completely beyond the realm or influence of politics. So, the conventional trend of looking at certain themes as inherently political and certain other themes as innocent, naive and apolitical or beyond the corruption of political.

So these are all very, very naive understandings or very, very shallow understanding according to Said. So, he says that we have never, we have not found out a way to disassociate ourselves from the kind of larger power play that happens in determining our positionality. And also, when he brings that argument to the study of Orientalism, he says that this very location of these two geographic areas and the kind of historically constituted relations and forms of dominations which he traces back to the time of Homer, you know, thousands of years ago. So that particular vantage point has to be brought to the forefront so that even if it is a poet that is written by a westerner about the Orient, then it has to be seen in the larger context of this historical imbalance of power.

It cannot be reduced to a kind of artistic expression of this particular poet. So, coming to the second question, it is again a very interesting point about this methodological question. So, what is the kind of methodology that Said adopted in this particular book? So, he says that in a previous book I have good deal of thought and analysis to the methodological importance of work in the human sciences of finding and formulating a first step, a point of departure, a beginning principle. Now you know the point that Said is trying to explain in this section is how do you organize your work? Because as we know what Said is going to do is a huge effort, it is a monumental effort because he is

trying to critically analyze a huge body of knowledge which spans across disciplines, spans across different centuries, written by scholars of different orientations. It is not only academic studies, it also includes all kind of artistic expressions, all kind of literary expressions.

So it is a huge amount of body of knowledge written about the Orient by the western scholars. So how does one deal with this material? How does one actually make the first step? What is the point of entry? How does one organize all these material in order to tell a kind of a convincing story? So Said is addressing these questions. So, I learnt and tried to present was that there is no such thing as a merely given or simply available starting point. Beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them. So, the reason you cannot really go chronologically, there is no point in trying to understand what is the first work or what is the first artistic expression made about the Orient and then do a kind of a chronological analysis does not make much sense.

So there has to be a first step and this first step must enable you to, there has to be a what he says a starting point. So, the beginning have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows for them. Nowhere in my experience has the difficulty of this lesson been more consciously lived than the study of orientalism. The idea of beginning, indeed act of beginning necessarily involves an act of delimitation by which something is cut out of a great mass of material separated from the mass and made to stand for as well as be a starting point, a beginning. For the student of text one such notion of inaugural delimitation is Althusser's idea of the problematic.

A specific determinate unity of a text or a group of text which is something given rise to by analysis. Yet in the case of orientalism there is simply, there is not simply the problem of finding a point of departure or the problematic but also the question of designing which text authors and periods that the ones best suited for the study. So here he is you know one of the, he is bringing in the argument of Althusser in his argument about this notion of you know problematic. So problematic is the kind of a conceptual or theoretical or even ideological you know ideological point that you really want to discuss in a particular text or in a group of text. So, what is the kind of theoretical engagement, what is the kind of theoretical or philosophical or even ideological issue that you identify in that text or the group of text.

So that is a very important you know way of entering into an analysis of a single text or that of a group of text. But he says that even here it is, there is no simply the problem of finding a point of departure or problematic but also the question of designating which text authors and periods are the ones best suited for the study. So here you know that

particular way of identifying a problematic is not much helpful rather he also will have to look at what are the texts and authors and periods are the ones best suited for the study of such a huge you know proportion. So yeah, as he says it has seemed to be foolish to attempt an encyclopedic narrative history of Orientalism. First of all because if my guiding principle was to be the European ideas of the Orient there would be virtually no limit to the material I would have to deal with.

As we discussed it is so huge amount that is available. He says there still remains the problem of cutting down a very fat archive to manageable dimensions and more important outlining something in the nature of an intellectual order within that group of text without at the same time following a mindlessly chronological order. My starting point therefore has been the British, French and American experience of the Orient taken as a unit. What made that experience possible by way of historical and intellectual background? What the quality and character of the experience has been? So, he is looking into the three specific British, French and American experience of the Orient and looking into its construction, its consequences and other stuff. For reasons I shall discuss presently I limited that already limited but still inordinately large set of questions to the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam which for almost a 1000 years together stood for the Orient.

Immediately upon doing that a large part of the Orient seem to have been eliminated India, Japan, China and other sections of the Far East not because these regions were not important they obviously have been but because one could discuss Europe's experience in the near Orient or Islam apart from its experience of the far Orient. So, essentially Sayyid's work on Orientalism is about how Islam and Middle East has been understood and studied by and Orientalized by the Oriental scholars. So, in doing that he has to, he is forced to exclude vast expanses of geographical areas including India, China, Japan and other places. So, he says they are not unimportant but given the limitation of the scope of a particular single book he is delimiting this. So that is the preoccupation with the near Orient or Islam apart from this experience of the far Orient which the term that was used to designate South Asia and beyond.

So he elaborates what the kind of complexities involved in that process. So, then Britain and French dominated the Eastern Mediterranean from about the end of the 17th century on. So, it talks about what historical processes that he kept in mind in choosing this particular time and why that he chose not to engage with the secondaries like Italy, Russia, Spain or Portugal and others. So please read these sections. I am skipping some of the paragraphs.

In the second place and here the failings of my study of Orientalism are amply made up

for, there has been some important recent works on the background of biblical scholarship to the rise of what I have been called modern Orientalism. The best and the most illuminatingly relevant is E. Shaffer's impressive *Kubla Khan and the Fall of Jerusalem*. So, he talks about the recent works that have mostly emerged from the biblical study point and look at the rise of Islam.

So he also bring that section as a part of his engagement. So, this paragraph is about how why he is not dealing with German studies and German involvement others. So, details about that. So let us come to important point. There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority.

It is formed, irradiated, disseminated, it is instrumental, it is persuasive, it has status, it establishes canons of taste and values, it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas, it dignifies as true and from traditions, perceptions and judgments it comes, it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all authority can indeed must be analyzed. All these attributes of authority apply to Orientalism and much of what I do in this study is to describe both the historical authority in and the personal authorities of Orientalism. So, this is again he brings back the notion of power and authority to the fore and then argues that how authority creates, authority many often especially if you follow the arguments of Foucault and Gramsci, it becomes very evident that the power and authority does not manifest itself in the most raw or most violent form all the time. Foucauldian intervention in the analysis of power has been very very rewarding.

He talks about how power assumes very very different, subtle, less violent forms, how power is existing in a kind of a fluid manner, how power operates through existing authorities, existing institutions, existing civil society spheres and civil society associational forms. So that is something that needs to be studied very very clearly. My principle, a methodological device for studying authority here are what can be called the strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about and strategic formation, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between text and the ways in which groups of text, even textual genres acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large. So, this is what he is going to do. He puts forward two important concepts, one is the notion of a strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about. So, here the author is firmly in the foreground, the spotlight is on the author, spotlight is on the author and what he or she has written about.

So, writes about and strategic formation is how this particular writing, it creates a kind of a particular kind of strategic formation along with other texts, which then assumed

more mass in terms of or mass and more rigor in terms of its conceptual clarity, in terms of its influence, in terms of its, you know, the kind of a mass it assumes and how that develops into types of texts and even textual genres acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves. So, acquiring a referential power among themselves is a very important point. So, you start writing certain thing and somebody who has the kind of an intellectual and political affinity with your work begin to quote you and somebody else join the group and then you quote each other's, you take each other's work as a reference. So, in this particular process, somebody else work reinforces yours and yours in turn reinforces their work. So, after sometime this would emerge as a formidable set of work, very interrelated work which has this ability to cross reference each other and then appear as if it is scholarly enough as if it is a very rigorous theoretical exercise.

I use the notion strategy simply to identify the problem every writer on this orient has faced, how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimension. So, anyone who writes about the orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the orient. Translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative, voice he adopts, the type of structures he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text. All of which add up are to deliberate ways of addressing the reader containing the orient and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf. So, everyone who writes about the orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the orient translated into his text.

This location includes the kind of narrative, voices he adopts, the kind of structures he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text. All of which add up are to deliberate ways of addressing the reader containing the orient and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf. So, this is the most crucial way in which Said interprets the kind of an oriental literature. So, he looks at how an author positions himself, what kind of images and motifs that he uses and how gradually he begins to represent the orient, which in reality he does not. He is not a part of the orient, he comes here because he can, because of the power relation he is able to occupy that position, but gradually through his scholastic abilities he claims that he is able to represent and many times even not only represent, not only depict and then later represent, but even later speak on behalf of it, speak on behalf of the people as if he knows better than what the people themselves know.

So, these are very, very interesting points that he talks about. None of this takes place in the abstract, however. Every writer on the orient and this is true even of Homer, assumes some oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the orient to which he refers and on which he relies. Additionally, each work on the orient affiliates itself with other works, with audience, with institutions, with the orient itself. So, the ensemble of

relationship between works, orients and some particular aspects of the orient therefore constitutes an analyzable formation.

For example, that the philological studies, the anthologies of extracts from oriental literature, the travel books, the oriental fantasies whose presence in time in discourse institutions give its strength and authority. So how there is a kind of a network or there is a kind of a system of dependency over these things work in its form. It is clear I hope that my concern with authority does not entail analysis of what lies hidden in the oriental text, but analyze rather of the text surface, its exteriority to what it describes. I do not think that this idea can be over emphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority that is on the fact that the orientalist, the poet or scholar makes the orient speak, describes the orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.

He is never concerned with the orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes by virtue of the fact that it is said or written is meant to indicate that the orientalist is outside the orient, both as an existential, as a moral fact. And this is again a very, very central theme. So, he is not trying to understand the hidden meanings or hidden ideas inherent in a particular book, but what he emphasizes is this whole importance of exteriority. To what extent the orientalist is perennially pretending as if he is outside this whole thing what he describes.

Its exteriority to what it describes. I do not think that this idea can be over emphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority that is on the fact that the orientalist, poet or scholar makes the orient speak, describes the orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes by virtue of the fact that is said or written is meant to indicate that the orientalist is always outside the orient, both as an existential, as a moral factor.

So this is another very important point that he emphasizes. The principal product of this exteriority is of course a representation. As early as Aeschylus play the Persian, the orientalist is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening otherness into figures that are relatively familiar. You know, it goes on with the kind of analysis.

So this particular point is important. Another reason for insisting upon exteriority is that I believe it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchanges within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not truth but representations. Because his entire preoccupation is about how a particular culture is represented by a group of experts who do not actually belong to that. So, it is all about representation and not about truth. So, it is hardly needs to be demonstrated again that language itself is a highly organized and encoded systems which employs many devices to express, indicate,

exchange messages and information, represent and so forth. In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence but a re-presence or a representation.

The value, efficacy, strength, and apparent veracity of a written statement about the orient, therefore relies very little and cannot instrumentally depend on the orient as such. So, this again he brings in more sophisticated arguments about how language itself is a system of representation. Language itself is a system of representation and anything that is written or spoken cannot kind of claim that it actually represents the truth or reality. Because language is a system through which something is represented. It is presented again through a kind of modified altered view.

So the value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the orient, therefore relies very little and cannot instrumentally depend on the orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as the orient. So that is the argument that he makes. Thus, all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the orient. The Orientalism makes sense of all depends more on the West than on the orient.

And this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that makes the orient visible, clear, there in discourses about it. And these representations really upon institutions, traditions, conventions agreed upon codes of understanding for the effects not upon distance and amorphous orient. Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object. Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it rather than its putative object, its putative object is the oriental society itself which was also produced by the West. Thus, the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relations to the dominant culture surrounding it.

My analysis consequently tried to show the fields, shape and internal organizations, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical text, doxological ideas, exemplary figures, its followers, elaborators and new authorities. So, in a sense Edward says Orientalism is also the study about the West. How all these factors, all these pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical text, doxological ideas, and exemplary figures constitute the important element of what the West talks about. Then, yet unlike Michel Foucault to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of text constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. The unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other.

So here, he talks about, he says he acknowledges of course his indebtedness to Michel Foucault, but he disagrees or he kind of slightly changes the kind of concept that he borrows. So, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon otherwise anonymous collective body of text constituting a discursive formation. Because in the Foucauldian writing or the Foucauldian argument, the individual scholars have almost zero agency in altering the kind of a discourse. If you are a part of a discourse, if you are writing something in the discourse, you are determined, over determined by the larger structural logic of a discourse and your individual agency is almost absent there. And this is a very prominent theme in Foucauldian writing, at least in his earlier writing and towards his latter things he began to acknowledge the importance of individual agency to what extent individual can kind of resist the kind of a larger importance of discourses and other things.

So, the unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other. Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors. As I mentioned earlier, it is a group of people who come together, who come from similar background, cherish similar kind of cultural background or are infused with similar ideas. Then they come, they study a particular society called as orient and then they cite each other, they take others work for reference and then it kind of builds up as a system that cross references with each other, which adopts somebody's justification for its own existence and vice versa. So that is, so he says even though it includes an ample selection of writers, this book is still far from a complete history of general account of orientalism.

On this failing I am very conscious. So, as we discussed it is not something possible or needed for that matter, what Said sets out to achieve. So, then these sections he gives kind of introduction to each of these sections, each of the chapters. And third one is again a very interesting one. He says the personal dimension. What Edward Said as an individual, as a person, as a man, as an individual to do with what he does in the form of his writing.

So he again declares that as an individual who was born in a particular place, who had a life history of a particular kind, he is central, he is central in this whole exercise. His personal location, his personal biography, his individual convictions, his individual political positions have assumed significant central position in defining or in this whole enterprise. So, in the prison notebooks, Gramsci says the starting point of a critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is and is 'Knowing Thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an affinity to trace, traces without leaving an inventory. The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci comment at that, whereas in fact Gramsci's Italian text concluded by



adding, therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory. So, it talks about how 'Knowing Thyself' is an extremely complicated process.

Who are you? Not in a philosophical or spiritual sense, but in terms of the historical, cultural, and political context. So is the consciousness that what one really is. So, he says that much of the personal investment in the study derives from my awareness of being an oriental as a child growing up in two British colonies. All my education in those colonies, Palestine and Egypt and in the United States has been western and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of orientalism has been an attempt to inventory in the traces upon me the oriental subject of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of oriental.

So he, as I mentioned earlier, he firmly places himself, his lived experience, his life, early childhood in two British colonies of Palestine and then Israel. Sorry Palestine and Egypt, so how these early life incidences or his location as a person has a huge impact on his intellectual exercise. So that is something that he very strongly puts forward. And the historical circumstances making such a study possible are fairly complex and I can only list them schematically here. Anyone resident in the west since 1950s, particularly in the United States will have lived through an era of extraordinary turbulence in the relations of East and West.

So he talks about it in the larger political context how as somebody who lived through those eras could not escape the kind of influences that he feels. One aspect of the electronic postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which Orient is viewed, televisions and talks of other things. So, three things have contributed to making even the simplest perception of the Arabs and Islam into highly politicized almost raucous matter. One the history of a popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism. Something that has become, that has accentuated in the post 9-11 scenario.

We know that there is a huge back crash against Islam and some of these Middle Eastern countries in the West. Two, the struggle between the Arabs and the Israelis Zionism and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large. So, the Arab-Palestine issue or the Arab-Israel issue, Palestine-Israel issue has been a central debate in the US because US has a huge powerful lobby of the Jews. So, as an Arab person, as a person of Palestinian origin Said this is very badly troubled by that. Three, the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam.

So these are furthermore it hardly needs saying that because the Middle East is now so

identified with great power politics, oil economies and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom loving democratic Israel and evil totalitarian and terrorist Arabs. The chances of anything like a clear view of what one talks about in the talking, talks about in talking about the Near East are depressingly small. So maybe we can say that Said identifies himself as a minority not only in terms of his ethnic origin but also in terms of the ideological intellectual group where nobody kind of talks about in a more sympathetic or empathetic way about Islam and Middle East. The whole dominant discourse has been heavily influenced by this Zionist ideologues and others. So, these frustrations must have made or they have made Said to take up this kind of a personal thing.

So the nexus of knowledge and power creating the oriental and, in a sense, obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance. I have been able to put to use my humanistic and political concerns for the analysis and the description of a very worldly matter, the rise, development and consolidation of orientalism. So, he identifies himself very firmly in that whole process. So this is the introduction and as I mentioned I am not going into the details of the book, there are three more chapters, substantive chapters which look at very specific texts and then arguments which is very much beyond the purview of our class or our course.

The intention of introducing orientalism and spending I think some three hours in discussing this paper was to, this chapter was to introduce you to this very monumental work and try to bring in how a series of arguments which became very powerful in the subsequent decades was put forward in this book. And the introduction provides you with a very good overview, a summary or gist of arguments of Said. So, in the coming lecture we will have a guest lecture by Mr. Navaneet who will provide you with a very comprehensive critic of this book, Orientalism. So, we will see you in the next class.