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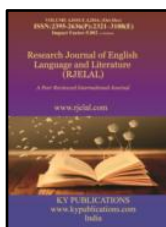
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EDWARD SAID'S *ORIENTALISM* : THE MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes an attempt to examine the most crucial book on which postcolonial theory rests upon. Edward Said's *Orientalism* stands as a landmark in the field of postcolonial studies. It talks about the division of the east and the west and also incorporates into its study area the domains of hegemony and discourse in order to make representations conform to reality. Main focus of this paper is upon representation that why it was done and what were the consequences of this representation.

Key terms: Orient, occident, representation, stereotype, hegemony

In today's literary world the term postcolonial is used very frequently. Postcolonial literally means after colonialism. This word is made just by adding a prefix "Post" to the main term 'colonial' so in order to understand the term one has to be familiar with what colonialism stands form. Colonialism is a phenomenon from 15th century onwards whereby some countries and people tried to dominate other lands. It is a historical process where the west tried systematically to negate the east and thus justifying their presence. The west had economic reasons for their expansion. A ready market for the consumption of their commodities as well as new places to exploit for their own benefit were the strongest reasons behind their aim of colonization. Another aim being to control and mould the indigenous natives.

Postcolonial on the other hand means after the colonial period but it also incorporates into its arena the period of colonization as well. Like most of the post's i.e. post modernism or post-feminism etc. It does not negated the colonial times instead it goes hands in hand with it. To understand these concepts and theories various critics have come up with varied view points but the cornerstone of

postcolonial theory was laid by Edward W. Said's seminal work *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*.

Edward Wadie Said was born in Jerusalem in 1935 and educated in British and American schools. To quote Patrick Williams:

Said lived the combination of being part of the centre (the United States) and the semi-periphery (the Middle East); part of the west and the non- West . . . part of (supposedly) one of the great national identities of the contemporary world, and part of a fragmented people, scattered, oppressed and ignored; part of the elite, and part of the undistinguished or indistinguishable mass of the majority world; part of the ivory tower academy and – as a one time member of the Palestine National Council- part of a radical political struggle. (269-70)

He was principally influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno.

Said is critically acclaimed worldwide for his book *Orientalism*. This book is a genuine attempt of Said

in order to lay bare the policies of the west so that it may dominate the east easily and willfully.

Said defines orient in the introduction of *Orientalism* as:

The orient is not only adjacent of Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the sources of its civilization and language, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the orient. In addition, the orient has helped to define Europe (or the west) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.(1-2)

Said argues that this orient is not imaginative rather the west has so intentionally tried to conform orient to its image that this orientalism looks like a political agenda of conforming the image to the real. Said argues:

The orient is and integral part of European material civilization and culture. *Orientalism* expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.(Said 2)

Orientalism has its major point of discussion as 'representation'. Representation became an important aspect of it. "The very fact of the west's representation of the Arabs, Islam, the near east stretching over the entire orient, in the process of formation of knowledge about the 'other' brings out the problematics of studying and representing others, and its methodological limitations" (Mohanty 35).

The orient has been transformed from an idea in to a reality. The ideas of orient were floated by the west that it gathered a huge amount of literary material that ultimately resulted in construction of orient as a concrete reality.

Robert Young divides that book into two major segments. The first:

concerned with the invention of orient by Europe and its construction as a representation; the second with the moment when this representation, the academic knowledge that was fabricated

around it became as instrument in the service of colonial power as the orient shifted from an alien to a colonial space. (Young 129-30)

Said argues that Orientalism became a potent tool in the hands of writers of the west that they started representing each and everything through the point of view that they imbibed in their minds about the east. It became a repository of knowledge for the unknown and the unknown or alien orient was looked at through the coloured glass of orientalism.

Said draws upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony and says that hegemony gives strength and durability to Orientalism. Hegemony stands for domination by consent and through this oriental discourse the west floated the idea of superiority of west over east and tried to dominate it. In this book Said "unmasks the ideological disguise of imperialism" (Gandhi 67).

Said also demonstrates how the encounter between the orient and the occident was caged in so called scientific discourse by which European culture, represented in great part by novelists and poets, perceived the orient. Said proposed that a false image of orient was deliberately floated where all the negative and nefarious qualities were attributed to the east and all the good and noble things were associated with the west thus making west superior and lending an inferior place to the east.

Said opines, "the cultural role played by the orient in the west connects orientalism with ideology, politics and logic of power, matters of relevance, I think to the literary community" (26). Moreover *Orientalism* justified the presence of westerners in the east and projected that, "The oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen) childlike, different thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature 'normal'" (40).

Through *Orientalism* Said openly talks about the method adopted by the occident to take control of the orient in theory and practice. *Orientalism* discusses the ways the occidental texts used to adopt in order to conform orient to its image floated through discourse ridden works.

Said argues that the long colonial European rule has had a negative influence on the most objective texts on the east. These texts are biased where by the west is portraying east as weak, feminine and sending the east into the realms of perpetual otherness. He also talks about why this representation was done. It was done just for a single focused reason that is to portray the west as masculine and all authoritative so that hegemonic domination could be achieved . To come to conclusions, this paper focused upon the policy of representation that was adopted by the west in order to dominate and legitimate their presence in the oriental lands. The orient was labeled with all the non virtuous capacities and this thing legitimated the occidental's presence and rule over their land. This thing has been meticulously developed by Said in his well celebrated book *Orientalism* which is said to be the seminal work related to the postcolonial theory.

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