

# ***Orientalist Approach in Historiography***

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Edward W. Said\*\*

How does one represent other culture? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discourses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?

## **ABSTRACT**

*The problems of cultural differences and contacts between East and West have given birth to the terms Orient and Occident. The West had visualized the Orient as subordinate to dominate and rule over them. While constructing their narratives, they selected only the material that suited their perceptions. The purpose of the present study is to understand how the Orient was imagined under such constrained cultural realities of East and West and the imperial project of dominance over East. In this regard following questions are raised to understand the origin of Orientalism and Oriental studies: Why the relationship between Islam and the West was constructed on binary oppositions? What were the main objectives of Europeans to build hegemony over the Orient particularly in South Asia with the framework of Foucault's web of power relation?*

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\*\* Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), 325

## Introduction

The term Orient or East is not a new phenomenon; it has a long history. The problems of cultural differences and contacts between East and West have given birth to the terms 'Orient' and 'Occident'. The Orient, in the West, is considered to be a mysterious and unintelligible land. The West had visualized the Orient as subordinate to dominate and rule. The West had devised certain fixed paradigms about the history, culture, and religions of the Orient, to educate their fellow Europeans and later the natives. In this regard, narratives were constructed that suited Orientalists' perceptions based on selected material.

Michael Dodson argues that 'the West has produced and managed — through a long history of literary production, academic scholarship, ethnography, and stereotyping — an image of the non-Western world as degenerate, exotic, despotic, essentially religious, effeminate, and weak'.<sup>1</sup> The non-Western world, in short, is imagined as the 'Other' of the West. The purpose was to demonstrate the superiority of their religion and culture, the hegemony of Christianity over Islam, and the dominance of Western-professed democracy over Muslim rule in the East. They searched for the material to understand and know the land and the people they were ruling as colonizers. By knowing the Orient, as Dodson describes, 'the West enabled itself to appropriate the Orient, speaking for it, and ruling over it'.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of the Western perception of the Orient is derived from Aristotle's work *The Politics*, in which he classified forms of government and compared peoples in three distinct ways. For the form of government, he envisaged 'good rule as, that which was in the public interest, based on general regulations and not arbitrary, and accepted by willing

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1 Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (United Kingdom: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 2.

2 Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, 2.

subjects'.<sup>3</sup> He further indicated that 'the authority of a constitutional ruler over subjects was different from that of a master over slaves'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he compared systems in other ways, by climate, by people, and by geography. Three categories of people, he envisaged are geographically divided in three regions: Europe, Asia, and Greece. People of the first region are deficient in skill and intelligence but have spirit, and that is why they continue to remain comparatively free; the second have skill and intelligence but are deficient in spirit and thus continue to be subjects and slaves; the Greek people, geographically between the other two, have spirit and intelligence".<sup>5</sup> Curtis analysis that "Aristotle contrast the first and third category of people (the Hellenes and the Greeks), as inherently free and civilized, with the second category (implicitly Persians) as barbarians and uncivilized who were slaves by nature". Thus, the "Other" for Aristotle was the Persians.

The Orientalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century selected those areas under study where Muslim rule was established. The basic subject matter of Oriental studies was religion, particularly Islam. The West considered Islam as a threat to Christianity and the growing objective of modernity in the West and adjacent Western lands. In this context, the Orientalists talk about the Orient not only in geographical terms but also as the Islamic East. The Orientalists, mainly missionaries, aim to 'undermine and ultimately destroy Islam to establish the paramountcy of the Christian religion'.<sup>6</sup> The West and Islam are seen mainly as binary opposites. The historical hatred of the Westerners/Europeans toward Islam, its spread, the Crusades, and the Muslim Occupation of Sicily and Spain are perceived as painful memories. The

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3 Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.

4 Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 52.

5 Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 52.

6 Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 105.

Oriental study, at the initial level, was in the context of Islam and had no political purposes but commercial and missionary ones. Over time, parameters were widened and the West's power relations with the East, to differentiate cultures of the West and East, and textual construction of the Orient was included in the subject.

The purpose of the present study is to understand how the Orient was imagined under such constrained cultural realities of East and West and the imperial project of dominance over East. In this regard following questions are raised to understand the origin of Orientalism and Oriental studies: Why the relationship between Islam and the West was constructed on binary opposition? What were the main objectives of Europeans to build hegemony over the Orient particularly in South Asia with the framework of Foucault's web of power relation?

### **Edward Said's Perception of Orientalism**

The term Orientalism is derived from the word Orient. It was Edward W. Said who popularized the term in his famous work with the same title published in 1978. Said says, 'the Orient is an integral part of European material, civilization and culture'.<sup>7</sup> His publication changed the way in which historians must write about European researches into 'the Orient' and the rise of colonial governance'.<sup>8</sup> Said's work is considered the key to understanding *Orientalism* in which he gave imaginative insight into the Orient and critiqued the texts that were produced by individuals directly or indirectly involved in the imperial enterprise. Said argue that:

Orientalism is a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European-Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies,

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<sup>7</sup> Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880*, 1-2.

the source of its civilization and language, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the 'Other'.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, Mohammad Samiei employed the term "West-and-Islam Dualism" to define Said's ideology of Orientalism which promotes the idea that 'Others are less human'.<sup>10</sup> He is of the view that 'the vast corpus of Orientalism was to legitimize and promote Western superiority and dominance by inventing the ideology of the West and Islam dualism'.<sup>11</sup> This dualism, according to Samiei, is a binary opposition between the West and Islam, which was constructed to 'justify and naturalize some structured patterns of domination and exploitation'.<sup>12</sup>

To understand Orientalism, Said in his work, *Orientalism*, has given three meanings: first, "Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West."<sup>13</sup> Second, "the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony."<sup>14</sup> Third, "the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away."<sup>15</sup> Said further believed that "Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient."<sup>16</sup> The three views above reflect that the notion of

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9 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 1. The construction of the Other is described as monolithic, static and stagnant, or changeless, inferior, simple an irrational, primitive, exotic and mysterious.

10 Mohammad Samiei, "Neo-Orientalism? The Relationship between the West and Islam in our Globalized World", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 7 (2010), 1145.

11 Samiei, "Neo-Orientalism? The Relationship between the West and Islam in our Globalized World", 1146.

12 Samiei, "Neo-Orientalism? The Relationship between the West and Islam in our Globalized World", 1146.

13 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 5.

14 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 5.

15 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 6.

16 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 6.

Orientalism was designed to dominate over Eastern societies in the fields of religion, culture, and intellect, and then the idea of secularism was introduced to capture the minds of the colonized people.

However, Orientalism practices in South Asia were devoted to advancing and empowering the colonial state. The British administration in India, as stated by Dodson, 'clearly understood that the attainment of knowledge of Mughal and local forms of governance and land taxation practices, as well as of Indian languages and belief systems, provided the East India Company with the most basic tools with which British imperial administration in India was to be forged and maintained'.<sup>17</sup> This could be a shifting set of policy positions and localized practices by the imperial administration, which were constantly adapted to changing circumstances in both the colonial context, and with respect to evolutions in metropolitan British thought, rather than a static *modus operandi*.<sup>18</sup> Dodson further argues that 'orientalist methodologies forged in the eighteenth century became an integral part of nineteenth-century educational policy which accepted the metropolitan British liberal preoccupation with the effecting of Indian progress on a European model'.<sup>19</sup> He says that 'orientalism was not directed solely at the construction of ruling authority upon European terms, but rather, was also a series of strategies to coopt, control and adapt elements of established Indian social, cultural, and political authority'.<sup>20</sup>

The term 'Orientalism' is a Western invention. It describes the way the West views and perceives the East to understand it in terms of Western experience. Further, to understand the Orient and Orientalism Said describes that:

The person who teaches about, or researches the Orient — and this applied whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist,

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17 Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, 5.

18 Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, 4.

19 Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, 4.

20 Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, 5.

historian, or philologist — either in its specific or general aspects, such a person is deemed an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.<sup>21</sup>

Tehmina Noreen in her research also elaborates that it is indeed, a process by which over a long period the Westerners have created the world of the Orient with stereotypes and fictitious characters that had nothing to do with the reality of the times.<sup>22</sup> Mohamed Fairuz-bin-Ahmad says in his academic research that:

The texts were produced by the Orientalists when boundaries between two previously separate cultures were crossed; in the form of Occidental expeditions, missionary work, trade, leisure travel, and so on. These contacts were also marked by asymmetries of power, which allowed the Occident to 'imagine' and 'produce' the Orient textually.<sup>23</sup>

Said also argued that the imaginative Orientalism had enabled the Occident to 'grasp', 'know', and eventually control both its geography and its people. As such, these imaginings tend to be antagonistic and based on "imaginative geographies."<sup>24</sup> The whole process of understanding the East was quite organized. The term Orientalism is the perception of the Orientalists and what they perceive and judge whether it is real or not.

The knowledge that was produced about the Orient is Western in origin in the form that constructed Oriental Studies. Orientalism is a school of thought which is based on the sharp distinction between the East and the West, and gained currency, especially during the imperialists'

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21 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 2.

22 Tehmina Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India" (Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 2010), 6.

23 Mohamed Fairuz-bin-Ahmad, "Orientalism and Integrate History: A Study of an Early 20th Century Islamic Periodicals in Singapore" (Thesis, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2010), <http://scholarbank.nus.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10635/18808/AhmadMF.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 26/12/2011), 2.

24 Ahmad, "Orientalism and Integrate History," 2.

colonization across the globe.<sup>25</sup> The literature on the Orient, which was produced by the Orientalists, had gained importance to legitimize colonizers to rule in the colonized land and overpower the local inhabitants by coined Orient, the 'Other'.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Influence of Foucault's Conception of Discourse on Orientalism**

The literature which the Orientalists have produced, created the distinction between the Western and non-Western world as 'Us' and 'They'. The non-Westerns were labeled as irrational, despotic, and against modernity while the Westerns were conceived as *vice-versa*.<sup>27</sup> The Orient emerged as a problem to be solved by the Occident, so the imperialists acquired knowledge of the land where they established their rule to subordinate people and rule them. They followed the words of Michel Foucault that "knowledge gives power and more power requires more knowledge."<sup>28</sup> Foucault saw power as 'the determinant of what are called truth and knowledge'.<sup>29</sup>

The Foucaultian argument, says Curtis, was applied to the intellectual and cultural interaction between the Western Europe and the Orient. He further says:

The basic assertion is that Western Europe, and then an extended West including the United States, has not only dominated and exercised colonial or imperial rule over the Orient but also that, through intellectual and aesthetic means, it has created an essentialist, ontological, epistemologically insensitive distinction between a "West" materially developed and self-

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25 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India," 7.

26 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India," 7.

27 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India," 8.

28 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India," 8.

29 E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000* (New Delhi: Orient Longman (Pvt.) Ltd., 2004), 284.



assured about its superior civilization, and an "Orient" which it regards as inferior, backward, and not modernized.<sup>30</sup>

The imperialists assumed themselves superior in all aspects and had the right to rule the Orient. Orientalism, Noreen concluded, is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."<sup>31</sup>

In formulating Orientalism, Edward Said is indebted to Foucault's conception of discourse. Michel Foucault is the one, who established a full-blown theory of the intersection between the production and dissemination of knowledge on the one hand, and the operation and expansion of power structure on the other. He aimed at providing a critique of the way modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge claims and practices of the human sciences.<sup>32</sup> Said, in his *Orientalism*, incorporated strategies and analysis advanced by Michel Foucault. The philosophy of Foucault, according to Hiddleston, means that 'the creation and use of knowledge itself is political, and can serve to propagate and reinforce the social marginalization and oppression of those who do not conform to the norms of the dominant discourse'.<sup>33</sup> In his introductory chapter, Said contends that:

Without examining 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. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism had that no one writing, thinking, or acting on

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30 Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India*, 8.

31 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India", 9.

32 E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000*, 285.

33 Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 76.

the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism.<sup>34</sup>

He further believes that "because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action."<sup>35</sup> Orientalists' by following Foucault's perception adhered that "history is perspectival knowledge, as assertion which deprives the past of its hegemony over the present."<sup>36</sup> The Western world collected material from the Orient and shaped it according to their ideologies. According to Mohamed Fairouz-Bin-Ahmad, this conception of discourse by Foucault is:

Something that can produce something else, like an idea, which in turn can affect how one thinks and behaves. Discourse also involves the delimitation of a field of objects, the definitions of legitimate perspectives for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories.<sup>37</sup>

The British colonialist, in this context, applied the discourse of Foucault to establish their rule over India, attacked various Indian institutions and labeled South Asia as static and stagnant and had no historical change. The British also established learned societies, like the Asiatic Society, for inquiring into the history and antiquities, the natural productions, arts, sciences, and literature of Asia. They applied the Marxist model and set their theories according to the 'Asiatic Mode' or 'Asiatic Society', which according to Marx is "an Oriental society characterized by ceaseless political changes in ruling dynasties and by total economic immobility."<sup>38</sup> Bryan Turner, like Asaf Hussain, utilizing Foucault's discourse said that: "Orientalism served the interests of imperialism and the West by stressing the absence of a 'civil society' in Islam: an absence that resulted

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34 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 3.

35 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, 3.

36 E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000*, 285.

37 Fairouz-Bin-Ahmad, "Orientalism and Integrate History", 27.

38 Asaf Hussain, Robert Olson and Jamil Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1984), 32.

in Islamic decay and decadence and in Western vibrance, democracy, and dynamism".<sup>39</sup>

The term absence of civil society, according to Turner, was given to define Islamic rule as despotic and contrary to the democratic institutions of the West.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Oriental despotism was described negatively. Curtis says, it was applied to 'Eastern systems and specifically to the Ottoman Empire with the growing conviction that they were of a different order from Western systems and had rulers who were absolute, arbitrary, and corrupt, and had societies that were stagnant'.<sup>41</sup> He assumes that Marx saw the Orient as backward, as well as stagnant, because he was perhaps influenced by Richard Jones and John Stuart Mill.<sup>42</sup> The Indian writers countered the allegations of European writers and expressed their anger by saying that 'Oriental despotism' just showing European outlook because they had inherited the classical idea that wisdom and enlightenment were always a sort of monopoly of the West.<sup>43</sup>

### **Western Perception of Islam**

The contrived perception of Islam persists as inferior, unchanging, and militant by the West; and superior, dynamic, and peace-loving by Muslims.<sup>44</sup> The dichotomy between the two was created when Christian Europe faced challenges from Islam, particularly from the Ottomans, and Muslim rule in Spain and North Africa.

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39 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 2.

40 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 2.

41 Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 52.

42 Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 249.

43 Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century* (New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2008), Exerpts from Orientalist Writings on Ancient India, 8.

44 Mohammed Arkoun, "Re-thinking Islam Today", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 588, Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities (Jul., 2003), 18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049852> (accessed on 01-03-2011).

It was assumed that the dawn of Islam and then its rapid progress throughout the world created tension and a threat to Christianity.<sup>45</sup> The Christian scholars and missionaries were not ready to accord it the status they enjoyed.<sup>46</sup> Christian missionaries laid the foundation for the development of Orientalism that fueled the antagonism against Islam and widened the sources of knowledge against Muslims to distort Islam. This intellectual perception of the Orientalists reached its peak during the first half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Missionaries from Belgium, France, Britain, Holland, Spain, and the United States were all involved in it. Asaf Hussain in an essay *The Ideology of Orientalism* named such Orientalists as S. Zwemmer, H. Lammens, D. B. Macdonald, M. A. Palacios, C. De Faucoult, Montgomery Watt to K. Cragg, who have all produced Oriental studies which created doubts about Islam or relegated it to an inferior status.<sup>47</sup> Bernard Lewis also highlights an example of such an Orientalist in his work *Islam and the West*. He cited a professor from Al-Azhar University of Egypt who wrote a tract in which he describes Philip Hitti of Princeton as follows:

A Christian from Lebanon: One of the most disputatious of the enemies of Islam, who makes a pretense of defending Arab causes in America and is an official advisor of the American State Department on Middle Eastern Affairs. He always tries to diminish the role of Islam in the creation of human civilization and is unwilling to ascribe any merit to the Muslims. His *History of the Arabs* is full of attacks on Islam. All of it is spite and venom and hatred.<sup>48</sup>

In an introduction, Asaf Hussain elaborates heterodox views of Orientalists who propounded that Islam is an unchangeable artifact and resistant to reform. They rejected

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45 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India", 7.

46 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 3.

47 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 5.

48 Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 105.

historical reforms and changes in Islam and Muslim rule of the East. They believed that Islam must reform on Western lines to meet modern challenges. They claimed that "reforming is an active element of only Western culture, of its humanism, of its search for truth, of its commitment to the development and welfare of the individual."<sup>49</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, in his book *Khtbata-e-Ahmadiya*, criticized Muir's piece of writing and also gave satisfactory answers to all those questions that Muir had raised.<sup>50</sup>

Modern theories and assumptions about the nature of Islam have also been criticized by many intellectuals. Recent works like Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong with Islamic Civilization* by professional historians who have pointed out their biased views. Even Western scholars also criticized them for their lack of objectivity and prejudices. The Orientalists' knowledge about Islam is not to understand it in its context but to discredit it. They only study Islam to identify themselves as different from the backward, irrational, and static Islamic East.<sup>51</sup> Their hatred and bigotry about Islam, over the last few decades, turned into a new notion of Islamophobia.

### **Orientalists' Construction of India**

To understand and reconstruct India for Colonial domination, the Orientalists applied different methods and techniques. While studying and writing the history of ancient and medieval India, they presented British colonial point of view. To understand and represent other culture is very hard. But Orientalists comparatively evaluated the Indian cultural, religious and political life and indirectly described and elaborated the Indian past. In this concern, the Asiatic Society of Bengal was established on the pattern of the

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49 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 3.

50 Ahmad Saeed and Kh. Mansoor Sarwar, *Trek to Pakistan* (Lahore: Institute of Pakistan Historical Research, 2003), 22.

51 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India", 7-8.

Royal Asiatic Society of London, endeavoring to collect Indian past literature and modify it according to the interest of British rule.

They produced and reconstructed Indian historical sources according to the British administrative policies. They viewed and imagined the Indian past in the parameters of the Western present and did not rightfully justify it. The Orientalists, after the Enlightenment in the West, had put India into the category of static or semi-barbaric cultures. They saw Christianity and the Western education as the vanguard of change. In their endeavor to label India as a backward country, they were backed by the Benthamite Utilitarian philosophy and James Mill being a disciple of Bentham found the Indian culture a static and a degraded phenomenon, which he thought could only become useful, if the Western ideas and knowledge were infused through the proper laws administered by a despotic government.<sup>52</sup>

After Marxist perceptions of the Asiatic mode of production became a part of Western thought, some British authors interpreted Indian history in that theoretical framework and labeled South Asia as static and stagnant that had never undergone a change, which, over time became an accepted truth. Orientalists formulated their theories according to the 'Asiatic Mode' and Asiatic Society, (a version of the conventional political notion of Oriental despotism) which according to Marx is "an Oriental society characterized by ceaseless political changes in ruling dynasties and by total economic immobility."<sup>53</sup> With the increased knowledge of India and its cultures, the Orientalists came to realize their weaknesses and, therefore, started to distort Indian history.

The Orientalists' passion was to promote Western culture and its political interests and thus they provided ground to legalize and legitimize British colonial rule in India. For this purpose, they labeled Muslim rule in India as despotic,

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52 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 401-02.

53 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism*, 32.

autocratic, theocratic, and tyrannical in its character.<sup>54</sup> They considered Muslim rule without a constitution in which people had no voice and the element of the welfare of the people was missing. Keeping in mind the problems of the East India Company and working under its patronage, the Orientalists studied and compiled their writings about India. These compilations aimed to colonize and civilize the uncivilized Indians.<sup>55</sup> They asserted the notion that British rule was for India's good whether they liked it or not.

On the one hand, they were claiming that the Indians were uncivilized and had no element of the welfare of the people. According to Wittfogel, the land of the Orient was decentralized of feudal character.<sup>56</sup> But the fact is that British rulers had given patronage to feudal elites to exert an iron grip over the common people and peasants of India for the colonial authorities. In return, the feudal elites were gaining support by recognizing their *jagirs* (revenue-free grants of land) and they had also been given responsibility for the maintenance of law and order. The oppression of the feudal over common people continued to make them loyal and subordinate to the royal authority.<sup>57</sup> They had established a concrete system of inferior and superior which is persisting in South Asia.

The response to the Orientalist historiography in India came from both the Nationalists and Marxist historians. The British who claimed to have benefited India in economic terms, were criticized by persons like Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chandra Dutt. Naoroji developed a 'drain theory and blamed the British for their established rule to drain India's wealth. Dutt asserted that the agrarian problems of

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54 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India", 11.

55 Noreen, "Orientalist Construction of the State in the 13th and 14th Century India", 11.

56 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism*, 38.

57 Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-47* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33.

India were deliberately widened by the British Raj. They had given patronage to the feudal elites to subordinate peasants to strengthen their authority. Both concluded that the British were responsible for the poverty of India.<sup>58</sup>

What methods and means the Orientalist' had use to reconstruct India, but their first and foremost concern was usually negative, exotic and derogatory representations of the Orient. For example, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill presented theories of the absence of 'civil society' and the bourgeois individualism which were challenged by the unpropertied class.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the Orientalists assumption of the absence of 'civil society' in Islam was actually, according to Asaf Hussain "the reflection of the basic political anxieties about the state of political freedom in the West. In this sense, the problem of Orientalism was not the Orient but the Occident."<sup>60</sup>

Even the labeling of Oriental Despotism had given the shield to Enlightenment Despotism and monarchy in Europe.<sup>61</sup> While discrediting the Wittfogel's thesis of *Oriental Despotism*, K. P. Jayaswal, another nationalist historian, wrote a book entitled, *Hindu Polity* (1918). In this masterpiece, Jayaswal tries to trace the history of the Indian democratic institutions that existed since ancient times.<sup>62</sup> Romila Thapar, who is an Indian Marxist historian, also defies the notion of 'Oriental Despotism' that symbolizes the unchanging nature of the Indian past. She also challenges the Marxist notion of the 'Asiatic Mode' and says that private property existed in ancient India.<sup>63</sup> Another Marxist Indian historian, Irfan Habib argues that the Marxist model cannot be applied to India in  *toto*  because the social formation of India is different from the West. We have a caste system

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58 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 436.

59 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism*, 32.

60 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 39-40.

61 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 39.

62 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 440.

63 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 481.



which is a rigid form of labour division, which is part of the relation of production.<sup>64</sup>

Bryan Turner suggested alternatives to Orientalism in that both Christianity and Islam must focus on those features that lead to unity rather than division, or at least to examine those ambiguous fault lines that may lead to cultural overlap between them.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, if Islam is considered an Occidental religion and Christianity as an Oriental religion will help in exposing the basic ambiguity of the notion of 'the Orient'. Thirdly, Islam and Christianity were confronted by "the existence of a highly developed system of secular logic and rhetoric which was the legacy of Greek culture."<sup>66</sup> During the medieval period, Islam achieved philosophical developments while Christianity was a parasite on it. Later, the European universities became the home of these philosophical developments. The Orientalists who deny the contribution of Islam to European philosophy need to be reminded that "the philosophical and scientific legacy of Greek civilization passed to Europe through the prism of Islamic Spain."<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

To conclude, the Orientalists' construction of historiography of the Orient has its origins in the intellectual weaknesses of the West to those of the East. Orientalism as a discourse tried to assign the values and vices of the European people to those of the Eastern people. Religion is the sensitive element of any society but the Orientalists first criticized Islam and the Islamic rule in Asia without mentioning the Muslim rule in Europe. The Orientalists wrote on almost every aspect of humanities to make the Orient feel inferior. They constructed power relationship between East and West on Foucault's theory and tried to legitimize the British rule. The denial and insult of the East in every field of life was

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64 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 484.

65 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 36.

66 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 37.

67 Hussain, Olson and Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, 37.

mainly because of the self-constructed hegemony of West over East. However, in reality, the Eastern people and values were totally opposite to those attributed to them by the Orientalists. In this context it was not just Edward Said, but also many other Oriental and Western scholars who contributed to a better understanding of these arbitrarily constructed paradigms. The West though still perceives the East as static, but this polarization can be decreased through the acceptance of realities on the ground.