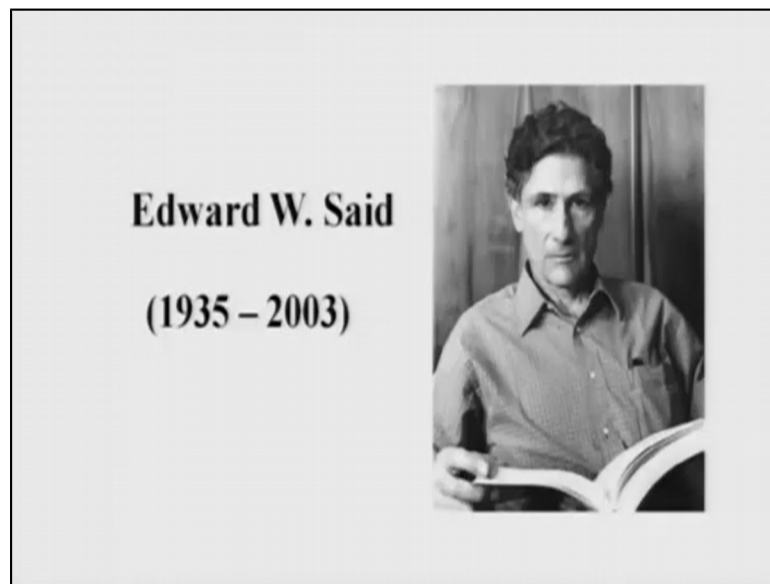


Postcolonial Literature
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Lecture No. #04
Colonial Discourse Analysis: Edward Said

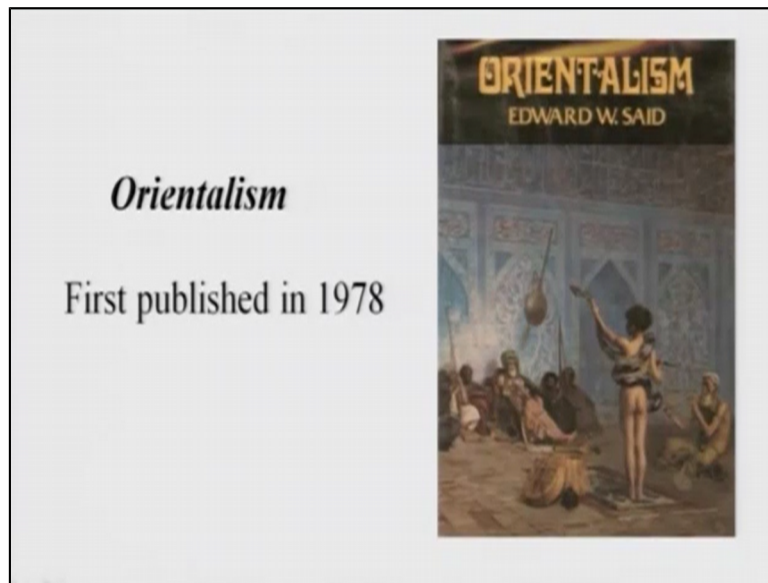
Hello and welcome to another lecture on, Postcolonial literature. Now, if you remember, we had ended our previous discussion, by briefly mentioning Edward Said and his book Orientalism. And, we had also mentioned, how about Said and his book Orientalism are associated, with the foundation of Postcolonial studies, as an academic discipline.

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In today's lecture, we are going to carry forward with this discussion. Now, in this book Orientalism, which was first published in 1978. And here, you can see the cover of the first edition of the book.

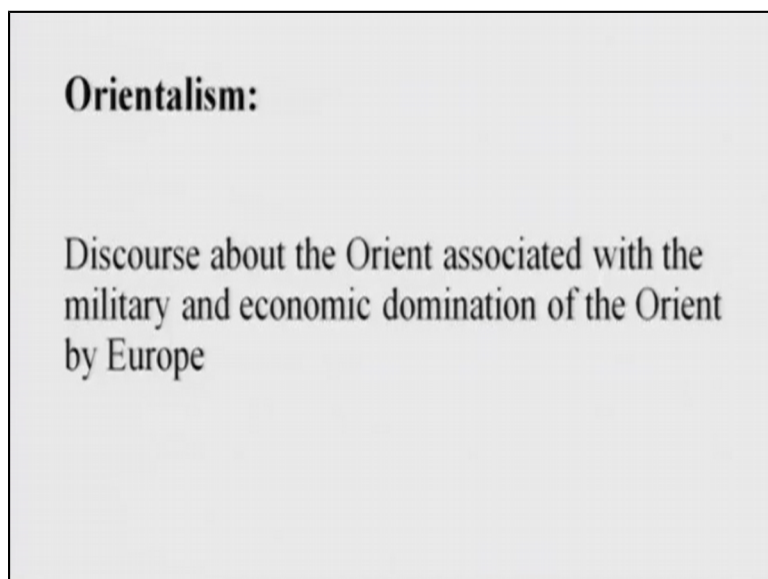
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Said's main argument is that, European Colonial domination of the Orient was integrally associated with, how the Orient was conceptualised, researched, and talked about in Europe. In other words, what Said is saying in this book is that, the military and economic domination of the Orient, was tied up with the discourse about the Orient. And, it is this discourse about the Orient, that Said refers to as, Orientalism. Okay.

Now, as you can see this bills upon Foucault's argument, that power, knowledge, and discursive manifestation of knowledge, are integrally related with each other. But, what Said is doing here is that, he is taking this generalised concept, that we find in Foucault, and he's applying it to the specific context of European Colonial domination of the Orient. So, let me repeat again, what is Orientalism.

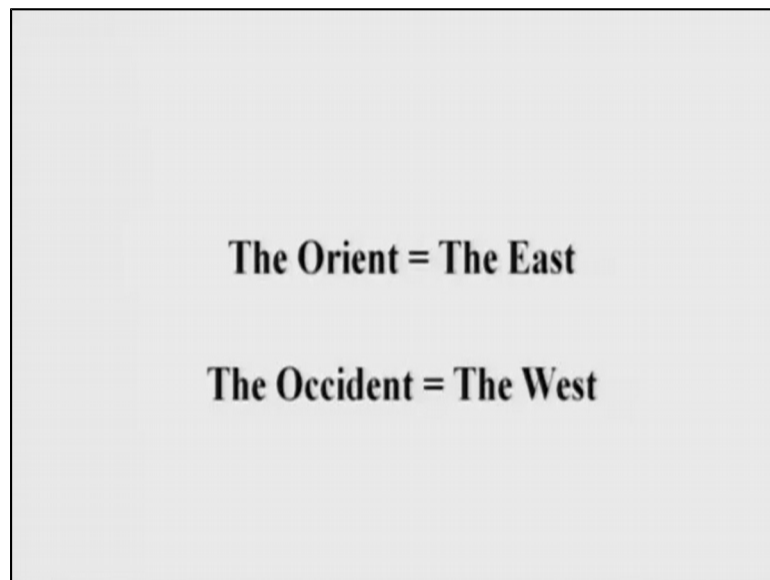
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Orientalism, as Said defines it, means the European colonisers discourse about the Orient, which is tied up with the military and economic domination of the Orient. And, this definition, which you can see on the slide, is a rough and ready definition of Orientalism. And, in today's lecture, we will try to elaborate on this particular definition, to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the concept of Orientalism.

So, let us start by looking at the term, Orientalism. This term, derives from the root word, Orient, and its derivatives like Oriental, or Orientalist. And, broadly, all of these terms, refer to the East, or to things related to the East. But, the question here of course is that, East of what. Well, the reference point here is, Europe.

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And, the Orient signifies a land, that lies East of Europe. Which means, more specifically, the Orient or the East refers to the land, that we now know as the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. This Orient, or the East, is contrasted with the Occident, or the West, which in turn, refers to Europe. And together, the Orient and the Occident, or the East and the West, forms a conceptual binary. A conceptual binary, that informs various texts, including a text like Rudyard Kipling's, The Ballad of East and West. And, in The Ballad of East and West, he writes very famously, East is East, and West is West, and never shall the twain meet.

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**“East is East and West is West, and never
shall the twain meet”**

The Ballad of East and West
Rudyard Kipling

So, in this line, you can see how, East and West, Orient and Oxidant, they are used as a binary peer. Such use of East and West, or Orient and Oxidant, as contrasting conceptual categories, also occur regularly in more mundane conversations, where terms like the East and West, or Orient and Oxidant, are used as scriptic shorthand way, to denote not just geographical spaces, but also certain cultural values. And, cultural values, that include things like, food habits for instance, dress codes, bodily postures, or even moral conduct.

In these instances, the Orient and the Oxidant, offer a kind of matrix, to conceptualise the world, by dividing it into two broad mutually exclusive categories. Where, whatever is represented by the Oxidant, the exact opposite is represented by the Orient. So, according to said, this particular style of thinking, this particular way of thinking, is a vital aspect of what constitutes Orientalism, or the discourse about the Orient. But, it is only one aspect. Because, along with this one, said also talks about two other aspects, which together form the notion of Orientalism.

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Three Aspects of Orientalism

- Orientalism is a particular way of thinking
- Orientalism is an academic discipline
- Orientalism is a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient

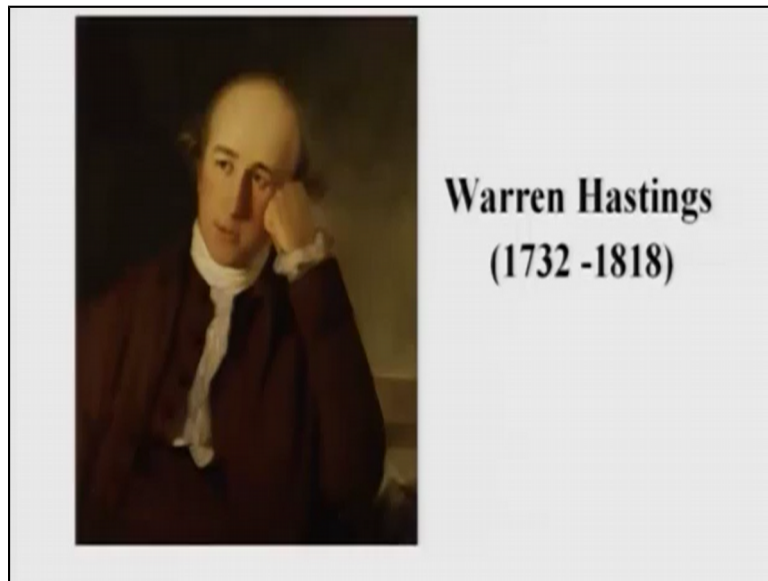
And, here in this slide, you can see the three broad aspects of Orientalism, that Said talks about. So, the first aspect is that, Orientalism is a way of thought, or a style of thought, that is pivoted on contrasting the Orient, from the Oxidant. The second is that, Orientalism is an academic discipline. And, the third is Orientalism is a corporate institution, for dealing with the Orient. And, will be taking up each of these three aspects, one by one in today's lecture. And, let us begin with the, first one.

According to Said, instances of Orientalism as a binary way of thinking, can be traced as far back as say, the Greek tragedies of the 5th century BCE, where the Orient was imagined, not just as a land of Asia, but as the other of the European self. That is to say, whatever Europe stood for the Orient as a foil, stood for exactly the opposite things. If the Oxidant or the Europe, stood for masculinity for instance, then the Orient by contrast, assumed a feminine entity, in this imaginative geography.

If, for instance, the Oxidant represented mature, adult hood, then by contrast, the Orient became representative of childish, immaturity. If the Oxidant considered itself to be at the pinnacle of civilisation, then of course by contrast, Orient came to represent, the depths of barbarism and moral and cultural depravity. So, in other words, the discourse of Orientalism presents the Orient, as this dark and on a regenerate counterpart of the Oxidant, which is simultaneously foreign, loathsome, and yet excitingly exotic.

As, I have just told you, such a discourse, which uses this binary way of thinking, and which presents Orient as a sinister, yet alluring entity for the West, for Europe, has been prevalent in Europe, for more than a millennia. But, during the heydays of European Colonialism, this discourse enjoyed special relevance, and it mutated itself into an academic discipline. And therefore, here we come to the second aspect of Said's definition of Orientalism.

According to Said, it was precisely, when European powers started militarily conquering the Orient, during the late 18th century, Orientalism emerged in Europe, as an academic discipline. So, there is an inherent connection, according to Said, between the military conquest of the Orient, which started roughly from the late 18th century onwards, and the emergence of Orientalism, as an academic discipline in Europe.



And, the dates of Warren Hastings are 1732 to 1818. And, therefore, again, his tenure in India, was late 18th century. So, the dates, more or less coincide with Napoleonic conquest of Egypt. Right. And, here again, we see a similar approach, to transform the conquered country in to a field of systematic knowledge gathering. So, Hastings, along with two other Colonial officials, William Jones and Nathaniel Halhed, researched, compiled, and published voluminously, on various aspects, related to India.

And, these publications were on topics as diverse as, Law, Literature, Astrology, Botany, History, Language. So, this kind of systematic knowledge gathering, which was made possible, largely because of the military conquest and control of the Orient, inaugurated during the 19th century. Academic fields like Egyptology, academic fields like Indology, all of which, were part of the broader umbrella called Oriental studies.

And, Oriental studies, by the end of the 19th century, had become an integral part of the Western academia. So, the huge amount of documents, that this academic Orientalism produced, was soon acknowledged in Europe, as the most authentic way of knowing about the Orient.

So much so, that someone like the British philosopher James Mill, could justify writing a multivolume history of India, just by consulting the available documents on India, that were available in England, without ever visiting India, without ever living there, without ever

knowing a single Indian language. This is what, Mill writes in the preface to his history of British India, justifying his position.

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“This writer [...] has never been in India; and, if he has any, has a very slight, and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. [...] [Yet] it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the inquirer to ascertain every important point, in the history of India.”

Preface, Volume I, *The History of British India*

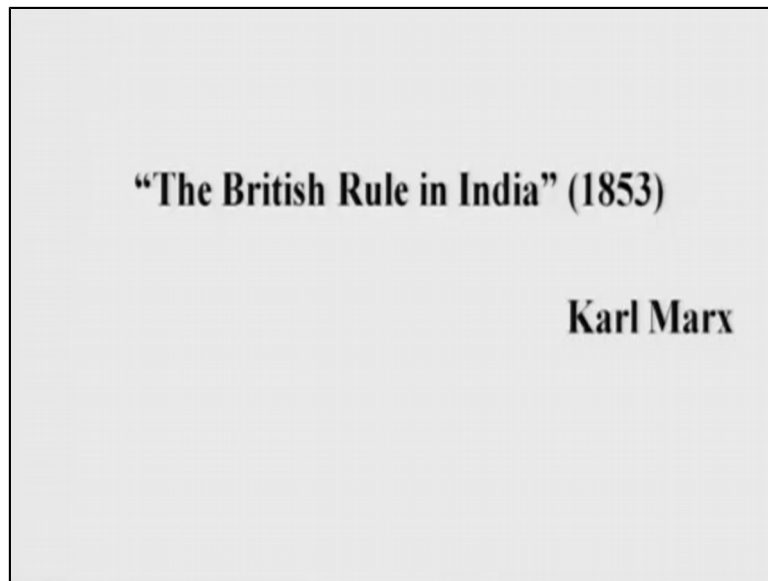
This writer, and here, Mill is referring to himself, has never been in India, and has a very slight and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. Yet, it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the inquirer, to ascertain every important point, in the history of India. So, if we think about it, the very audacity of this claim, to know all the important points about the history of India, without ever living there, or without ever knowing any Indian languages, is mind-boggling.

Yet, such claims to knowledge about the Orient, was to become commonplace, during the late 18th and 19th-century. And indeed, in this regard, James Mill's history of British India, whose first volume was published in 1870, can be very well clubbed together, with Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 minutes upon Indian education, which if you remember, dismiss the whole tradition of Indian, or rather Sanskrit, and Arabic literature, without knowing any of these languages.

So, it is important here to note that, the rise of Orientalism as an academic discipline, during the late 18th, and during the 19th century, did not mean, that the earlier form of Orientalism completely disappeared. The style of thinking about the Orient, as a dark, backward, sinister, and barbaric other of the Oxidant, continued to underline, the new form of academic

Orientalism. And, it informed, whatever systematic enquiry was going on, about the Orient. Let us take an example, for instance. If we look at, this article.

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The name of the article is, the British rule in India. It was published in 1853. And, it was written by, Karl Marx. We will see that, in this article, Marx, in spite of being aware of the havoc, that British Colonialism wrecked in India, by destroying its traditional, economic, and social structures, considered this British rule, to be a boon in disguise. Why? Because, in Marx's analysis, the exploitative Colonial situation, I mean, Marx's own understanding of this exploitative Colonial situation, was underlined, at the same time, by the millennia year old prejudice, that the Orient represents, a backward and barbaric society.

And though, as a result of the British rule, Indians were sown into a sea of woes. This is, these are Marx's words. And, though they lost their ancient forms of civilisation, and even hereditary means of sustenance, what was actually lost was, ultimately, according to Marx, barbaric, and unregenerate customs, and ways of living. So, though the British colonisers inflicted this destruction, they were also according to Marx, ushering in a much-needed social revolution.

And, at the end of the day, Marx justified the British rule, as a much-needed social revolution. Because, he believed that, the British, who brought about these changes, were ultimately representatives of a superior civilisation. So, therefore, for Marx, even the most blatant forms of economic exploitation, which characterised Colonialism, and he was more than aware of those economic exploitations.

But, even those economic exploitations, became excusable, because the exploiters belonged to the Oxidant, and the exploited were the Orientals. Of course, these millennia old prejudices about the Orient, not only informed academic writings, but they also form the basis of literary texts, that made the Orient, its subject.

And, therefore in Edward Said's study of the new form of Orientalism, that emerged during the 18th and 19th-century, we find that, the names of literary writers, like Lord Byron for instance, or Gerard Nerwal, or Gustave Flaubert, occurring almost as frequently, as the names of James Mill, Thomas Macauley, and Karl Marx. But, here, at this point, I think, it is important to ask that, why was it, that such prejudices, such myths, and such half-baked research, conducted by people, who have not even seen the place, they were writing about.

How were these texts, so prevalent, during the late 18th and 19th century? Now, this question is of course, very easily understood, and explained, if we go back to the insight of Michel Foucault. Who? If you remember, pointed out, that the discourse that is generated, circulated, and ratified, by the institutions of the powerful, is the discourse, which gains acceptance, as the truth.

Similarly, after the European conquest of the Orient, in the 18th-century, it was the discourse of Orientalism, which was validated and circulated by the institutions of the Oxidant. And therefore, the discourse of Orientalism, with all its prejudices, with all its problematic research methodology, it was just discourse, that gained acceptance and validity, as the truth, the authentic truth, about the Orient.

Now, these various institutions, which included the Colonial legislature and judiciary, which included the Schools, Colleges, and Universities, set up in the colonised parts of the world, to propagate Western learning, which included the learned societies like Astute, the Egypt, or the Asiatic society. These institutions together, they form, what Edward Said identifies as a third aspect of Orientalism. So, these were the institutes, which connected Colonial power with Colonial knowledge.

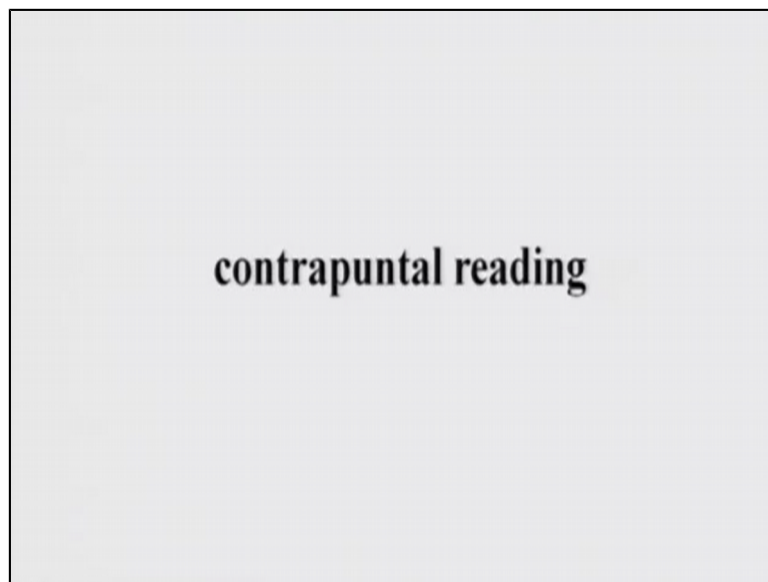
On the one hand, as institutes representing the authority of the colonising people, it ratified the biased views, and partial researchers, as the truth about the Orient. And, on the other

hand, it enabled the Colonial power, to justify its rule over the Orient, by using the myths of Orientalism. Thus, when the institutionally ratified discourse identified the Oxidant as the seat of civilisation, and the Orient as the Den of Barbaric customs and Wild rituals, it started making eminent sense, that European powers should have control over the Orient.

Not simply because, it was economically profitable to them, but also because, it was the morally right thing to do. In other words, it was precisely, this institutional framework, which supported the discourse of Orientalism, that repackaged the profit-making motives of European Colonialism, into a civilising enterprise. So, here it is important, I mean, one point is very important, and you should take note of it.

And, that point is that, though Said's Orientalism, beautifully unfolds the power, knowledge, nexus, that connects the discourse of Orientalism, with the military and economic domination of the Orient, by Europe. Said's main purpose, in this book, is not just to reveal this connection, but to disrupt it. And, the way, in which Said seeks to bring about this disruption, is through, what he calls contrapuntal reading.

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Contrapuntal reading of the texts, that use, the discourse of Orientalism. So, what is this contrapuntal reading. Well, contrapuntal reading, is an attempt to read the Orientalist texts, against the grain. In other words, against the way in which, its author, intends it to be read. And, how do you do it. For instance, this is done by questioning the inherent assumptions, that underline a particular text.

For instance, if you question the basic assumption that, Orient is civilisationally backward, then we will see that, Marx's arguments, in his essay about the British rule in India, his arguments in favour of the British rule in India, immediately breaks down. Because, they are premised on the fact that, Orient is backward, and therefore the British rule in India, is ultimately beneficial for them. So, if you question that basic assumption, then that argument unravels and falls flat.

So, the intention of contrapuntal reading, is to question the Europe centric values of the colonisers texts, and to point out and critique the myths and prejudices, that underlined them. In our next lecture, we will make use of this technique of contrapuntal reading, when we discuss, Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Thank you.