



# Orientalism and India

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## Introduction

”Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”  
(Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*)

In his much quoted verse above Rudyard Kipling revealed something of the nucleus of the long-lived tradition of Orientalist thought. According to J. J. Clarke, the ambivalence of the West [1] towards the East is age-old. The ”rich cultures,” ”superior civilizations” and ”ancient wisdom” of the Orient have inspired many Westerners, but on the other hand, the threats of its ”monstrous mysteries” and ”absurd religions” hailing from its ”stagnant past” have abhorred at least as many. For many, the Orient has been a dominion of hordes and despots or spiritual mystics and exotic sensuality. Exaggeration and imagination together with a range of both positive and negative stereotypes connected to popular prejudices have been essential to these views. Encountering the East has been significant for the self-image of the West producing identities ranging from decadent European modernity to concepts of cultural, racial and moral superiority. (Clarke 1997, 3–4. See also Pieterse 1992 and Hottola 1999.)

In his highly celebrated but also provoking book *Orientalism* [2], Edward Said (1935–2003) embarks on describing a long European tradition ”of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.” This tradition Said calls Orientalism [3]. Said concentrates mainly on French and British Orientalism of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, eventually, on contemporary American Orientalism. Said’s analysis of Orientalist discourse draws on various academic and non-academic sources, and the Orient of Said’s focus is limited mainly to Arab Muslim areas in the Middle East.

Said was a part of a rather critical academic conjuncture around the turn of the 1980s, drawing on theoretical developments in deconstructionism, feminism, post-structuralism and neo-Marxism (see e.g. Bhatnagar 1986, 3–4). Orientalism, for Said, means European academic and popular discourse about the Orient. The Orient has not been significant to Europe only for its sheer proximity, but for the fact that European states have had their richest and oldest colonies in the territory which has also been

seen as the source of European civilizations and languages. In a way, the Orient has also been Europe's cultural contestant and, hence, one of the most significant images of the Other. In addition to defining its Other by looking at the Orient, Europe has used the contrasting images, ideas, personalities and experiences of the Orient to define itself [4]. Said's study of Orientalism as a discourse functions as an example of "the postcolonial predicament" of Asians and Westerners alike. In Western scholarly work the West is either implicitly or explicitly, but nevertheless rather uncritically, accepted into a dichotomous relationship with the East.

In the case of India, Mary Douglas (1972, 12), for example, has claimed that India is "a mirror image" of Europe and thus a totally opposite world to the West. Moreover, Louis Dumont imagined a modern Western society that – unlike India – aspires to rationality and was essentially individualist compared to the collectivist or holistic India (Dumont 1972; cf. Spencer 2003, 238–240 [5]). The Western imagery of the Orient makes the image of the Occident possible, and thus produces a kind of imagined binary ontology. [6] It should be remembered, though, that the ethnocentrist binary ontologies are not only Western privilege. Non-Western societies – or any other societies for that matter – often have their own binary world-views dividing the peoples of their world (see e.g. Korhonen 1996, Baber 2002 & Spencer 2003). However, Western Orientalism is said to distinguish from Eastern Occidentalism for its intertwined relationship with colonialism. In Orientalist discourse, the Orient has been expressed and represented with the support of "institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles." In Said's words Orientalism is

*the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. These two aspects of Orientalism are not incongruent, since by use of them both Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient. (Said 1995, 73.)*

My intention here is to apply Said's study of Orientalism to hegemonically Western – or specifically Anglo-Saxon – discourse about India. I will concentrate on what I call Indo-Orientalist essentialism which means imagining the essential elements of Indian society and culture or "being an Indian." In discussing Indo-Orientalist essentialism I will, among other things, concentrate on the a special concept of time used in the discourse which in its representations divides "Indian time" into a primeval ancient Vedic time as a golden age of India and a time of degeneration of contemporary Indian society. This division is especially noticeable in the discursive formations concerning Indian Hinduism. I will also discuss how Anglo-Saxon Indo-Orientalism has been adopted by indigenous Indians to be used in nationalist discourse. Although an essential element of contemporary Indo-Orientalism, I will exclude the Euro-American "hippie exodus" to India as the other writers of this issue have concentrated on it (see also Hottola 1999 and Jouhki 2006).

## The Hegemonic Discourse of Orientalism

Orientalism, for Said, is "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient." Orientalists, he claims, have plotted their narratives about the history, character, and destiny of the Orient for centuries but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the geographical vastness of the Orient had shrunk, the discipline had expanded with colonialism, and "Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution." There was a new, positive, twist to Orientalism: "since one cannot ontologically obliterate the Orient [...], one does have the means to capture it, treat it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it." (Ibid., 94–95.)

Although Said's view on Orientalism has been criticized as monolithic (See e.g. Clarke 1997, 9–10; Dawn 1979; Lele 1994, 45–47 & Kopf 1980, 498–499), Said obviously sees many variations and modes in the ways Europeans have constructed the Orient. In his most general division, Said distinguishes between academic, general and corporate Orientalisms. In academic Orientalism, "[a]nyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient [...] is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism." Said believes that academically Orientalism still lives on as congresses are held and books are written with the Orient as their focus and the Orientalists as their authority. Doctrines and theses are still being produced with the Orient or the Oriental as their subject. As a style of thought, Orientalism draws on the epistemological and ontological distinction between the Orient and the Occident. In general Orientalism, a large mass of writers (of prose, poetry, political theory etc.) like Hugo, Dante and Marx have accepted the East–West distinction as a foundation in their theories, themes and descriptions of the Orient and its people. There is certain kind of exchange between academic and general Orientalism, and Said suggests that the exchange has been disciplined or even regulated. Finally, corporate Orientalism is materially and historically more defined than the other two meanings of Orientalism. Corporate Orientalism is the way Europe has ruled the Orient, and also how the Orient has been stated about, reviewed and taught institutionally. This is as significant part of the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (Said 1995, 2–3.) [7]

Said also makes a distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism. Manifest Orientalism has been comprised of "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology etc." whereas latent Orientalism has been more stable, unanimous and durable mode of thought [8]. In manifest Orientalism, the differences between Orientalist writers, their personal style and form of writing have been explicit, but the basic content of their writing, "the separatedness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability" has reflected the more or less unified latent Orientalism. Moreover, latent Orientalism and race classifications have supporter each other very well, especially in the nineteenth century. The "second-order Darwinism," of Orientalism has seemed to justify division of races to backward and advanced, and further, using a binary typology, to backward and advanced cultures and societies. The lesser civilizations have been thought to have suffered from the limitations caused by the biological composition of their race. Hence they have been seen as in need of moral-political admonishment and even colonization by Europeans. The

Orientalist discourse has been highly similar to the discourse approaching the delinquents, the insane, the women and the poor within Europe. They all have been deemed lamentably alien. As other marginalized people, the Orientals have been seen through (not looked at) and analyzed as problems (not as citizens), or confined or taken over. As Said states, whenever something was designated as Oriental, the act included an evaluative judgment. "Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected [...]." (Ibid., 206–207.)

To Said, latent Orientalism seems to have also been a significantly male-oriented world-view. Orientalist gaze in general has had sexist blinders rendering Oriental women objects of a male power-fantasy. The Oriental women have been seen as unlimitedly sensual, lacking in rationality, and, most importantly, willing. Said claims that the male conception of the world has made the Orientalist discourse "static, frozen and fixed eternally." [9] Thus also the Orient has had no possibility of development, and the Orient and the Oriental could not have been seen as transforming and dynamic entities. In a way, the Orient – like a woman to a man – has been seen as the weak and inferior partner. The Oriental has needed the Orientalist to be animated. The feminine Orient has waited for European penetration and insemination by colonization. (Ibid., 207–219.) Perhaps Said's rather old-fashioned feminism is somewhat exaggerating and not supported by contemporary postmodern feminism but it is true that the sexuality of both men and women was repressed during Victorian era and the Orient, for many colonialists and Orientalists, represented emancipation from strict norms of sexual conduct. Thus, it is not exaggeration to say, at least if one is to follow the essential points of Freud's thought, that Anglo-Saxon Orientalist depictions of India and the Orient in general reflected to some extent their sexual power-fantasies.

Said claims that Orientalism has significantly – but not necessarily categorically – imprisoned the Orient so that it "was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action." The discourse has been there whenever the peculiar entity of the Orient has been in question. The Orient as well as the Occident have been and still are man-made (cf. Anderson 1991 on communities as imagined entities). In a way the Orient could even be seen as a surrogate or underground Self of Europe, giving strength and identity to European culture. The West and the East as European ideas have had a long tradition including certain way of thinking, imaging and vocabulary to give the ideas "reality and presence in and for the West." Obviously there is an Orient, a geographical area that has its reality outside Western imagery, and this Orient is not a creation without corresponding reality. The Orient is not essentially an idea, because there are peoples, nations and cultures that are situated in the area called the Orient. The lives of these peoples, who cannot be united in any other way than geographically, have histories and customs, and a reality that is something more or outside the scope of European imagery. Thus, in a way Said acknowledges the existence of "real" Orient, but in examining Orientalism he is not interested in the truthfulness of the discourse compared to the Orient of reality. In other words, Said's purpose is not to "draw a better map" of the Orient. Instead, Said's studies the "internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient." (Ibid., 3–5.) The fact that Said is not giving any options to the Orientalism he so intensely criticizes,

has, not surprisingly, caused frustration in the academic circles defending Orientalist disciplines, and at least as many comments aiming to fortify Said's position. (E.g. Porter 1994; Bhatnagar 1986, 5–6; Joseph 1980, 948; Rassam 1980, 508; Savolainen 1993; Clifford 1988, 259; Turner 1997, 31 & 101–102.)

For Said, academic study of cultures, ideas and histories has to involve the examination of their power configurations. The relationship of the Occident and the Orient is one of power and hegemony that is manifested complexly and in varying intensities. The Orient was "Orientalized" by Westerners, Said claims, but not only because it was found to be Oriental, but also because it could be made Oriental. The foreign, wealthy, dominating European writers could tell their readers how the Oriental was typically Oriental, without letting the one being described to speak for himself. [10] The Orientalist immersed in the discourse had the power to define the Orient and its people without significant counter-discourse from the Orient's side. However, Said warns his readers not to think that Orientalism is just a system of mere lies or myths of the Orient. For Said's purpose, Orientalism is more valuable as a sign of Western power over the Orient than as a scientific discourse corresponding with reality (which is what Orientalists have claimed it to be). The "sheer knitted-together strength" of the discourse, its connections to socio-economic and political institutions, and its strong, durable foundations are something Said seems to be in awe of. Material investment has been essential in creating the body of theory and practice of Orientalism, and, consequently, in forming "an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" and into general culture. (Said 1995, 5–6.)

Hence, Orientalism for Said is a form of cultural hegemony at work. Some cultural forms predominate over others, just like some ideas are more influential than others. Said draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, a form of cultural leadership, to understand Orientalism's strength and durability (see e.g. Gramsci 1971 & 1996). The idea of Europe as "us" and non-Europeans as "those" (who "we" are against) is never far from Orientalism. The notion of European culture and identity being superior to non-European ones is "precisely what made [European] culture hegemonic in and outside Europe." Needless to say, this European hegemony has affected Orientalist ideas about the Orient, "themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness [...]." The European observer in the Orient has never lost his upper hand to the Oriental, claims Said. The European has gone to the Orient, has been present because he has been able to, and has experienced the Orient in a way that has met little resistance from the Orient's part. From the late eighteenth century onwards the Orient that could be displayed, theorized, and reconstructed emerged under the umbrella of Western hegemony, placing Western consciousness as the center of thought. There was a mass of material with overriding ideas about European superiority on which the individual writers, the pioneering Orientalists elaborated. (Ibid., 7–8.)

It is indispensable to note that for Said, Orientalism is not only some positive Western doctrine about the Orient of an era, but it is also an academic tradition with significance influence and it is a part of popular Western culture, including travel literature, business, governmental institutions, military, natural historians, pilgrims and so forth. To Western academic and non-academic people, the

*Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples, and civilizations. For the Orient idioms became frequent, and these idioms took firm hold in European discourse. Beneath the idioms there was a layer of doctrine about the Orient; this doctrine was fashioned out of the experiences of many Europeans, all of them converging upon such essential aspects of the Orient as the Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like. [...] Every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric. (Ibid., 203–204.)*

However, immediately after Said's rather judgmental last sentence comes an apology as Said reminds us that all human societies have offered the individual mostly imperialist, racist and ethnocentric tools to deal with "other" cultures. Orientalism, for Said, is understandable – although not necessarily justified – because it represents common human characteristics, but with a significant element of political domination on the side.

## **Orientalism and India**

Although Edward Said concentrated mainly on European Orientalism focusing on Arab Middle East, the Saidian approach to Orientalist discourse is thought to be validly applicable to other parts of the non-Western world, and various scholars influenced by Said have expanded his theories to include India [11]. In *Orientalism* Said himself only occasionally refers to Orientalist discourse on India. For example, he mentions William Jones (1746–1794), the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who, according to Said, with his vast knowledge of Oriental peoples was the undisputed founder of scholarly Orientalism. Jones wanted to know India better than anyone in Europe, and his aim was to rule, learn and compare the Orient with the Occident. Said finds it interesting that many of the early Orientalists concentrating on India were jurists like Jones or doctors of medicine with strong involvement with missionary work. Most Orientalists had a kind of dual purpose of improving the quality of life of Indian peoples and advancing arts and knowledge back in the heart of the Empire. (Ibid., 78–79.)

In Said's view, the fact of the Empire was present in nearly every British nineteenth century writer's work concentrating on India. They all had definite views on race and imperialism. For example, John Stuart Mill claimed liberty and representative government could not be applied to India because Indians were civilizationally – if not racially – inferior. (Ibid., 14.) Said also claims that India was never a threat to Europe like Islamic Orient was. India was more vulnerable to European conquest, and, hence, Indian Orient could be treated with "such proprietary hauteur," without the same sense of danger affiliated with the Islamic Orient. (Ibid., 75.)

Said also describes Romantic Orientalism that sought to regenerate materialistic and mechanistic Europe by Indian culture, religion and spirituality. Biblical themes were used in the project: the death of cold Europe was imagined, its spiritual rebirth and redemption sought after, but India per se was not as significant as the use of India for modern Europe. The Orientalists mastering Oriental languages were seen as spiritual heroes or knight-errants who were giving back to Europe its lost holy mission.

Although the themes were implicitly Christian, the Romantic project appeared secular in its post-Enlightenment ideology. (Ibid., 105–107.) It is rather obvious that unsatisfying Judeo-Christian thought and the "cold materialism" of Enlightenment made many Europeans seek for a lost spirit in the promised land of India, and, as Clarke describes,

*search for childlike innocence, a vision of wholeness, a yearning for the recovery of what the poets and philosophers of the period felt the age had lost, namely a oneness with humankind and a oneness with nature, and for a reunification of religion, philosophy, and art which had been sundered in the modern Western world. (Clarke 1997, 54–55.)*

Thus, there was a new twist to Orientalism, a "metaphysical thirst" which for the Romantics replaced the earlier politico-ethical need of Orientalism. Thus India begun to be seen as "the realm of Spirit." The nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Orientalism was rather explicitly racist, lauding Indian caste system as protector of racial purity and seeing contemporary Indians as bastardized and hence inferior race to the "original" and "pure" Aryan race. The caste system of Aryan Vedic society seemed to them as a functional hierarchical system which had degenerated in time. However, the same Orientalists who formed these racist theories at the same time looked romanticizingly to the East to criticize the degenerate Europe. (Ibid., 191–205.)

Interestingly, David Kopf, a well-known academic adversary of Edward Said, seems to seek justification for Orientalist treatment of India by mentioning how impressed Nehru was about the work of British Orientalists, and that Nehru used their knowledge to build up a nationalistic new India (Kopf 1980, 496). The fact that Orientalism is and has been grist for the mill for nationalism is not, in my view, a sufficient condition for justifying Orientalism, no matter how politically effective the combination is. However, Kopf's statement definitely hints towards the rather interesting question of indigenous Orientalism, that is, the phenomenon where the Orient is sort of recycled or reimported to its source [12]. It is exceedingly interesting to notice how – especially Romantic – Orientalist ideas of Indianness have been adapted to the self-identities of Indians. This seems to be partly due to the British educational system but also to the prestige that British ideas have held among the Indian gentility and academic elite. Ideas like Vedic times as the golden age, spiritual India, caste-centricity and Hinduism as one religion (or sort of superreligion or poetic universal life-philosophy) were, at least to some extent, Orientalist inventions and more or less as such largely accepted by educated Indians and/or reworked to serve Indian nationalism. (Heehs 2003; Narayan 1993, 478; also cf. Bharati 1970, 273.)

When the Indian independence movement gathered momentum, Orientalist texts were used to evoke national self-identity. For example, *Bhagavad Gita* was respected as the core or uniting holy text of whole India and the Hindu Renaissance used Orientalist literature to form modern Hinduism and – concurrently – India's nationhood. (Clarke 1997, 205.) According to Breckenridge and van der Veer, the consequent "internal Orientalism" seems to have been the most problematic issue in postcolonial scholarship of India. The Orientalist habits and categories still have such power that it is exceedingly difficult for either Indians or outsiders to view India without reverting

to the outdated discourse. The Orientalist ideas of difference and division from the colonial times have affected – or perhaps, infected – the foundations of public life in India. In the postcolonial era,

*Orientalism without colonialism is a headless theoretical beast, that [is] much [...] harder to identify and eradicate because it has become internalized in the practices of the postcolonial state, the theories of the postcolonial intelligentsia, and the political action of postcolonial mobs. (Breckenridge & van der Veer 1994, 11.)*

Bhatnagar interprets Indo-Orientalism by applying Frantz Fanon's writings [13], who saw in colonialism a triangular dialogue with a permanent illusory confrontation that included the settler, the native and the native intellectual.

*In this realm versions of origins are offered and resisted in a continuing dialectic; thus Fanon likens the self-justifying ideological operation of colonialism to the mother "who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence." (Bhatnagar 1986, 5; quotes from Fanon 1967, 43.)*

According to Bhatnagar, Fanon sees this relationship as an Oedipal tyranny in which the colonized people search for identity and continually return to "the terms of opposition set by the colonial mother." An impossible pure origin is something the reactionary forces of indigenous revivalism use and long for to obtain meaning for its contemporary being. Bhatnagar claims that this uncritical and politically suspect ideology is especially dangerous in the Indian context where the plural and secular identity has had to give way to a Hindu identity that has its imagined source in the Vedic times. (Bhatnagar 1986, 5.)

The essentialism, and the concept of a religiously/spiritually unique India that goes well together with it has become part of Indian nationalistic politics where all group differences are seen as dangerous separatisms. In contemporary India, a political group (e.g. a labor union) is in dire straits to constitute itself on the basis of shared interest without others thinking the interests are only a disguise for religious, caste or sectarian interests. "This essentialization and somaticization of group differences" claim Breckenridge and van der Veer (1994, 12), "is probably the most damaging part of the orientalist bequest to postcolonial politics." Especially the reinforcement of Muslim-Hindu opposition was a significant fundamental contribution of Orientalism in India. In Orientalist knowledge the two groups were essentialized and later institutionalized in nationalist political representations.

Orientalists as representatives of an academic discipline have been accused of being intertwined with and even of having supported British colonialism in India. Although there has been lots of debate about the subject or more specifically about intensity of the Orientalists' explicit involvement in and conscious support to colonialism, in my view it is obvious that, in addition to the relationship of Orientalism and colonialism, Indian Brahmanical authority and Indo-Orientalism supported each other. One even

could say that Brahmanic hegemonic discourse in a way de-Orientalized Brahmins and Orientalized the non-Brahmanic peoples of India (cf. e.g. Makdisi 2002, 772–773 who describes the same kind of phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire). Brahmanism-informed Orientalist discipline created an unchanged written canon to replace various oral traditions in Hinduism. Also scriptures like Bhagavad Gita became canonized by Orientalism, and spiritual leaders Gandhi made the text a fundamental scripture of Modern Hinduism. Orientalism helped to create the concept of "decline of Hindu society" by emphasizing the Aryan (Western) and Vedic past that was almost destroyed by foreign Muslim invasion.

This view has led Hindu nationalists to construct a religiously, philosophically and morally glorious Hindu past and the "foreignness" of Muslims. It was, as van der Veer has it, a "combination of Hindu spirituality and nationalism, informed by orientalism." Today's Hindu nationalists demand Christians and Muslims to accept the tolerance of Hinduism, shed their foreignness and submit to the inclusive, encompassing Hindu spirituality. Thus, Orientalist discourse has helped to essentialize Hindu ideology as the foundation of India. Muslims are seen either as outsiders or subsumed hierarchically, and Islam and Christianity have been seen as foreign and not culturally fit for India. This, of course, is essentialism par excellence rendering religions unchanging entities. (van der Veer 1994, 25–41. Also cf. Rajan 1986, 26–27 & Viswanathan 2003, 37.)

### **The Essential Ancientness**

Linguistic, civilizational and racial characteristics of Orientals were an undisputed central theme in Orientalism during the peak of imperialist era of Europe. Modern degeneration of cultures, theories about civilizational progress, belief in the White race's destiny justified colonialism and formed, as Said states, "a peculiar amalgam of science, politics, and culture whose drift, almost without exception, was always to raise [...] European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind." Darwinism was modified to support the view of contemporary Orientals as being degenerate vestiges of a classical ancient greatness [14]. The white scholar could study ancient Oriental civilizations with his refined reconstructive scientific techniques and use "a vocabulary of sweeping generalities" to refer to "seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions" to describe Orientals. Biological and socio-biological "truths" and Darwinist volumes concurred with the experienced abilities and inabilities of Orientals. Empirical data concerning the origins, development and character of Orientals seemed to give validity to the distinctions. (Said 1995, 232–233.)

At this point it should be reminded that one must refrain from the hasty conclusion that there was some kind of a general antipathy towards the Orient among European scholars. Though many explicitly believed in the inherent inferiority of Orientals to Europeans, a significant proportion of Orientalist scholars with strong sympathies, genuine interest and deep respect concerning Oriental cultures remained. There were many sympathetic Orientalists who also criticized the colonization of India. However there was and has been a general tendency to equate India with "ancient tradition" and Europe with "modernity." Interestingly, this kind of Occidentalism is still implicit in

modern sciences. For example, Coronil (1996, 78) is surprised how the representatives of very different ideologies around the globe are unanimous about the thought that the West is the origin and locus of modernity.

Moreover, Spencer (2003, 239) describes how the various dichotomies like traditional and modern, Western and non-Western, rural and urban, *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* and so forth seem to implicitly presume that the West means particularly modern and urban West. He also states rather ironically that the contemporary metanarrative of premodern-modern-postmodern setting a progressive continuum would have warmed many social scientists' hearts during the Victorian era. In studying Indian society many Orientalists have thought that their mission is to safeguard India (a place assigned to an essentially ancient time) from the effects of Western decadent modernity. In the process Romantic Orientalists have thought that with their help the West could regain something from the lost spirituality of Europe and also help rescue the residue wisdom of the degenerated contemporary Indian society. (Cf. Said 1995, 269–271.)

As throughout the history of Western Orientalism, the East has been praised for its ancient texts, the appraisal of the ancient has had the unfortunate implication of undermining the value of contemporary Oriental cultures (see e.g. Clarke 1997, 191). In the academic discipline studying India, particularly the contemporary Indian peasant was seen as disconnected from the valuable ancient traditions. If there were any valuable knowledge left, the "advanced castes" had the "correct knowledge." Hence, the simple folk wisdom and folk Hinduism were not worthy of study to most Orientalists. If the orientalists were to study contemporary India, a distinctively different and significantly more fascinating subject of scholarly interest was the philosophical Brahmanical Hinduism that was thought to best reflect the ancient Vedic world-view. (Marshall 1970, 43 in Lele 1994, 58.)

One should be reminded that there were many Romantic Indians and Europeans who saw the village India as a source of some sort of valuable ancientness. For example, Swami Vivekananda has been told to state that "the pulse of India" is felt in its villages, although the peasant's wisdom was seen as more emotional and devotional in its quality and the values of the "autonomous Indian village" lied in collectiveness which had been lost elsewhere in the process of modernization, whereas the wisdom of Brahmanic kind had a more refined and analytic – although at the same time spiritual – quality to it. Interestingly, Axelrod and Fuerch (1998, 459), concurring Ronald Inden's view, claim that the romanticized notion of the ancient autonomous Indian village went together well with colonial ideology that delegitimized an Indian nation on the grounds of its disunity. With a state full of self sufficient village communities without the sense of nationhood, how could there be unified state rule by Indians? Moreover, Indian villages were thought of as sort of timeless entities and thus "stuck forever into an unchanging past." Obviously, there were states in India before and during colonialism, but they were thought of as despotic and thus illegitimate. This framework of thought helped to justify European colonialism in India.

Sheldon Pollock contends that, in a way, British Orientalists, with the help of Indian informants emphasizing the hegemony of Brahmanic texts, created an Indian history and the widely accepted view of the contemporary Indian society. According to Pollock, Indian society was traditionalized and Sanskritized in an Orientalist way. (Pollock 1994, 96–97.) I would go far as to dare to call this a Brahmanical crisis of Indian studies, a phenomenon were the elitist Brahmanic view in a minority – although it is a rather influential view – is accepted as a sort of “core Indianness” and essential to Indian Hinduism. Obviously, this kind of division to “upper” and “lower” cultures in a society is quite universal. However, in India the Vedic literature and other so called official holy texts of Hinduism are surprisingly unfamiliar to many Hindus, many of them not having even heard of them. For example, Maloney (1975) studied Brahmanic Hinduism and its relation to “folk” Hinduism, and noted that many concepts (like *karma* and *dharma*) that have been considered as essential to Indian Hinduism have been either ignored or interpreted totally differently among the representatives of lower castes in India.

Rosane Rocher also describes how contemporary Hinduism was treated as kind of residue from the ancient Vedic Hinduism. The “natural light” of Hinduism was thought to have been eclipsed by folk superstition and ritualism that lacked the ancient, pristine, philosophical book Hinduism and was seen as an unauthentic religion reverted from the authentic ancient practices to repulsive polytheistic rituals. Surprisingly, even Christian scholars who saw themselves as representatives of the most rational faith could see many parallels with the ancient deistic Hinduism and Christianity, but not with contemporary “vulgar” Hindu practices. (Rocher 1994, 226–227.) Obviously, this kind of glorification of a past of a people is not limited only to Oriental societies. In Europe, for example, peasant culture has been seen to reflect a sort of simple and “natural” past. This kind of nostalgia seems to be rather common to all sorts of societies, cultures, subcultures and ideologies or even academic disciplines drawing on an “authentic” past (see e.g. Anderson 1991 for nostalgia in nationalism or Jersild 2000 for nostalgia in religion).

Although the Orient in general and India in particular have been thought to have degenerated from glorious ancientness, there is also the simultaneous view of India having remained essentially same as always. The myth of never-changing India is long-lived (even in present-day depictions of India) and has been adopted not only by Europeans but also by nationalist Indians (who also adopted many other Orientalist views). Even Prime Minister Nehru had stated that India has been able to absorb external influences and remain essentially the same for ages. This theme of an unchanging and absorbing India has been repeated throughout the twentieth century in scholarly and popular literature in the West and in India. To buttress an image of this kind, it has been helpful to implement naturalist and/or essentialist ideas of culture. According to Inden, without “natures,” “essential” or “inherent” properties, “defining features,” “fundamental characteristics” that are almost *de rigueur* concepts of a naturalistically inspired social science discourse, it would be difficult to imagine India that is still living by its ancient traditions. (Inden 1986, 16–17, 426)

The explanations for a stagnant India have used many elements and described various focal points of the society to arrive in their conclusions. One of the explanations has

been influenced by Max Weber's view on caste and Indian society. Weber explained why in his view Indian civilization had not developed into encouraging rationally oriented business activity like the West. (Weber 1958. See also Kantowsky (ed.) 1984.) Weber's India seemed to be essentially magico-religious whereas his Europe represented rationality. Weber even claimed that sciences did not progress in India because Indians had concentrated in a religion that denigrated empirical world. Weber's India was also synonymous to Hinduism, and Hinduism on its behalf was seen by Weber as an unproblematically monolithic single religion, an entity that gave India its essence. (See e.g. Badrinath 1984, 46–57.)

The more recent (and American) Weberian view has admitted that Indian civilization did exhibit rationality in the Weberian sense of systematic arrangement, but it in popular Western discourse and even often in scientific theses the Weberian view lives on as it is claimed that what India does not possess is the essence of the arrangement, the "world-ordering rationality," like the Weberian perspective is described. This rationality is associated by Weber with protestant Christianity, capitalism, cities and legal-bureaucratic forms of government. Weber's finding was that although there might be an industrious business man in an Indian artisan, the unique caste system which is an essential product of Indian Brahmanic mind, resisted the explication of capitalism. (Inden 1992, 131–132.) Hence, Weber's image of an "other-worldly" and holistically religious Indian society has still a strong hold of Western discourse on India.

## Discussion

Although the Anglo-Saxon Orientalist conceptions of India's valuable ancientness might be rather exaggerated, one must stop to think whether their most exuberant academic adversaries are, so to say, throwing the baby away with the bath water as they ignore valuable Orientalist depictions of Indian history. A veteran Indologist, Wendy Doniger seems to agree with the core points of Saidian treatment of Orientalism but she wants to remind us that the question about Orientalism (and colonialism) is not "whether [British colonialist] slept sound, but whether we Americans and Europeans engaged in the study of India can sleep sound." Before Said's *Orientalism* British Indologists were respected, admired and felt indebted to by classical Indologists. Doniger claims that the anti-Orientalist critique taught us to think Orientalists had committed a sort of grave academic sin.

*We who had once studied the Rig Veda with awe [...] came to react to the word "Veda" as if someone had said "fascism" (more precisely, "right-wing militant Hinduism"); the word had changed its connotations, just as "adult" had come to mean "pornographic" (as in "adult books and films, adult viewing"). (Doniger 1999, 943–944.)*

Doniger notes that the postcolonial critique is an intrinsic part of our thinking nowadays. In analyzing our texts about the Other we are told to look for the subtext and suspect that there is sort of a hidden transcript, something significant that has been censored because of it being less respectable and self-serving although more honest than the surface text. In the case of colonial India, we have been taught to interpret the British Orientalist/colonial surface text "We are bringing civilization to

these savages” as bearing the more truthful subtext ”We are using military power to make England wealthy by robbing India.” However, there are various layers to any text and agenda, and it would be hasty to assume there is only self-interest under the surface. Perhaps, under all kinds of subtexts there might be a nobler self-perception of the Orientalist where guilt resides, and, as Doniger suggests, ”perhaps, beneath that, there may be yet another layer, an admiration of India, a desire to learn from India, perhaps even a genuine if misguided desire to give India something in return.” (Ibid., 944.)

Doniger also questions whether the ”Myth of India,” the conception that Orientalists in a way created or imagined India, is itself a myth. She wonders if there was a black hole south of Nepal before British colonialist and Orientalists arrived there and created India. In Doniger’s view, the anti-Orientalist ”creationists” are even disrespectful of India ”which was quite capable of inventing itself and went right on inventing itself for centuries before, during, and after British presence.” Doniger admits that Indians did not imagine themselves as citizens of a nation, but surely they conceived themselves as people who lived their lives in a place that was different from others. Moreover, Doniger accepts the view that the British distorted and constrained the self-representations of Indians, but in her view the power of Orientalism was never so absolute that it could have entirely replaced the Indian ways of representing themselves, and it surely did not wipe out their knowledge of their own history. Doniger insightfully notices, not in a disagreement with Said, how Orientalism and anti-Orientalism both have taught us the power of language and especially of imagination because they both have disclaimed the agency of Indian imagination. (Ibid., 952. See also Heehs 2003, 173–175 for a similar note and cf. e.g. Pollock 1994, 96–97 for a contrasting note.)

In Heehs’ view Saidian interpretation of Orientalism and the Orient is itself part of the Orientalist discourse inside the history of Orientalism. Heehs notices that Saidian treatments of Indian history and culture began to appear within a decade after the publication of *Orientalism*. One of the first ones was Ronald Inden (1990) whose stated aim was to ”make possible studies of ‘ancient’ India that would restore the agency that those [Eurocentric] histories have stripped from its people and institutions.” But there is a lamentable aspect to Inden’s endeavor, claims Heehs concurring Doniger, because by claiming that European Orientalists constructed Hinduism, the caste system and so forth, Inden tends to take away the much sought-after ”Indian agency,” and gives new life to Eurocentrism. (Heehs 2003, 175.)

In other words, to blame Orientalism for ”imagining an India” often means for many to grant unjustified and excessive power to Orientalism and to ignore the significance of Indian self-representations. In my view, at its worst this debate has had the unfortunate tendency to develop into a dichotomy where the obvious option of multiple representations is ignored when scholars debate on whether or not the Anglo-Saxon Orientalists invented India. Obviously the Orientalist discourse has been hegemonic among Western and Western-educated scholars, but there have been multiple coeval indigenous representations that have been rather independent of Western representations or they have even significantly affected the Western views. Then again, it seems like many indigenous Indian self presentations especially in the

rural parts of the country have virtually nothing to do with either Indian nationalist or European Indo-Orientalism. Although, at the same time, national-level standardized representations and Hindu nationalism (*Hindutva*) spread via mass media seem to have brought a more unified image of what being Indian means in contemporary India. Obviously, this image has its own essentialisms and imagined “core Indianess.”

A fresh new start on the trenched debate between Saidian Orientalism critique and its adversaries could be the view according to which the problem lies in the fact that in history and geology have been fetishized. The results of sociohistorical relations between nations seem to us as internal attributes of naturalized, localized and bounded units. These units can be viewed as ethnic groups, nations or infranational entities like the West, the Occident, the Third World, the East and so forth or as localized intranational subunits like peasants, ethnic minorities, slum dwellers, the homeless and so on. Moreover, the markers of collective identities like area, culture, history or religion, are presented as autonomous entities. Identified by these markers interacting nations seem to be living isolated lives whose defining features seem to rise from the internal attributes of their histories, cultures or homelands. In fetishicized geography space is naturalized and history territorialized. Hence the West becomes a fetish of imperialism, the domain of the victors of history and the embodiment of their power. (Coronil 1996, 77–78.)

In the imaginative geography of Orientalism has seen India as the spiritual, degenerated, caste-centered, collectivist, holistically religious locus that has no coevalness with the West. At its worst Indo-Orientalist discourse has equated Indian present and past, and has imagined India in a timeless vacuum, an India that is essentially ancient and stagnant. If there has been change in India, it has been imagined to proceed towards degeneration. With the help of Romantic Orientalism Indian nationalism has performed a sort of Orientalist judo move to use the force of Orientalism to serve its own purposes. The Anglo-Saxon Orientalist depictions of India have been turned around and used to construct a discourse where the West has been seen as immoral, estranged in its individualism, and indulging in materialism without Spirit. In this discourse the ancient wisdom of India, and especially Brahmin Hinduism, have been seen as treasures for the nation to draw on, and which the soulless West should emulate to rise from its decadence.

India’s history is territorialized to exclude the so-called outside influence as not essentially Indian factors, or they have been seen as absorbed into the essentially changeless India. In popular culture both in Europe and India, Romantic bridge-builders have been trying to connect the West to the East and search for a synthesis that could combine the “European rationality” and “Indian spirituality.” In this view Indians need the more down-to-earth European attitude and practicality whereas the material West should adopt the emotional attitude rising from Indian spirituality. Interestingly, all representations seem to reinforce the binary ontology between India and Europe. At any case India and the West are highly imagined in the Andersonian sense. However, in the time of crisis of representation, as we can be seen as “prisoners of our discourses,” which makes it difficult to neutrally and objectively evaluate other discourses, it should be emphasized that the imagined India in scientific and popular discourse is not the problem *per se*, but the fact that there seems to be lack of

awareness of it. It seems like the significant and urgent quest is not so much to "draw a complete and truthful map" of India but to critically research what kinds of ideological and power relations have affected how "we" have represented "them."

In Indo-Orientalism political power seems to have been tightly intertwined in either colonial or indigenous nationalist representations of India. Moreover, the emancipatory anti-Orientalist approaches have drawn on patronizing political ideology of anti-Orientalist charity, a sort of imported intellectual guerilla tactics trying to paradoxically struggle for the agency of Indian self-representations – on behalf of the Indians. What has been common to most approaches on studying India is the fetishization of otherness, a compulsion to dichotomy between the West and India, whether it be expressed by Westerners or Indians.

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," Kipling's verse started in the beginning of the first chapter. However, Kipling continues in a hopeful manner which could one day be accepted also in the study of India.

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the  
earth!*

## Endnotes

[1] In this article concepts like "the West," "the East," "the Orient," "the Oriental," "the Occident," or "the Occidental" and their derivations are seen as representations of imagined entities. Hence, for the sake of clarity and brevity, and unless emphasis requires otherwise, I will leave off the quotation marks around these terms.

[2] Orientalism was first published in 1978. The reprint with a new Afterword used here was published in 1995.

[3] Said's choice of the rather highly generalizing term Orientalism has been widely disputed in consecutive academic discussion. See e.g. Smith 2003, 46–49; Heehs 2003, 169–171; Kopf 1980, 498–499. Said himself also contemplates on his choice in Said 1995, 2.

[4] Moreover, the Orient has been an integral part of European material civilization and culture.

[5] See also Gewertz & Errington 1991 for general imagined dichotomy of East and West in anthropology, including Margaret Mead's Occidentalism.

[6] At the same time it becomes more obvious that the two parts are less distinguishable because of reasons like globalization with interconnecting phenomena like large labor movements, global markets, ethnic tensions, diseases etc. See also Carrier (ed.) 2003.

[7] Said also sees many differences between Orientalisms between various European nations. For example, see p. 224–226 for British and French Orientalisms.

[8] One might say that latent Orientalism is sort of a more stabile subtext or an undercurrent of the more labile manifest Orientalism.

[9] It should be noted that Heehs 2003, 169–171 blames Said's view of Orientalism for the same. Heehs also sees a paradox in the relationship between the seemingly changing manifest Orientalism and the ever-static latent Orientalism. In his opinion, the way in which Said and his epigones criticize the essentializing of the Orient is itself an act of essentialism.

[10] Here Said gives an example with Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan who never spoke for herself in his text but still represented him the model of the Oriental woman.

[11] Breckenridge and van der Veer 1994, 3 contend that before Said's Orientalism two scholars had significantly criticized European academics for its image of the East: Raymond Schwab with *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* in 1950, and Abdel Malek with the essay *Orientalism in Crisis* in 1963. Subsequently, many scholars influenced by Said have continued to probe and criticize the Orientalist phenomenon, a few of them being Wilhelm Halbfass's with

India and Europe: an Essay in Understanding in 1988 and Ronald Inden with *Imagining India* in 1990. It should also be added that there have been various studies (e.g. in feminist anthropology) that have applied Said's approach to study a sort of Western internal Orientalism that focuses on the (often subaltern) Others of "our" society.

[12] Like the "pizza-effect" where Italian emigrants took pizza to America where it changed and became a popular dish and later was reimported to Italia as an indigenous traditional food. See Narayan 1993, 478 for reimported Hinduism in India. See also Kaviraj 2000, 141 in Heehs 2003, 180 who claims that "Orientalism – the idea that Indian society was irreducibly different from the modern West .... gradually established the intellectual preconditions of early nationalism by enabling Indians to claim a kind of social autonomy within political colonialism."

[13] Although Fanon did not write about India.

[14] Moreover, according to Heehs 2003, 177–180 many Orientalists tried to trace the achievements of Indian civilization back to ancient European predecessors.

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