

## Realpolitik of Gender and Religious Discourse With Reference To *Iranian Nights*

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### Abstract

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This paper aims at exploring the Realpolitik that has become the hegemony and a monopolizing tactic of West for East. In *Iranian Nights* Realpolitik is a system through which west has been ruling over East from centuries, in past this rule was over land and now it is over psyches. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* has explored how the binaries of Orient/Occident and Self/Other have given an aura of superiority to West over East. This paper further tries to explore the xenophobia that has completely over shadowed the minds and thoughts of Occident who have become more of 'fanatics'. In order to discover the Realpolitik of West the Postcolonial theory of Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* is taken in to consideration. This paper signifies that the roles given to east by west actually are their own characteristics that they cannot accept but are readily willing to impose them on others and this paper aims to challenge all the binaries created by West.

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**Keywords:** Iranian Nights, Orientalism, Xenophobia, Fanatics

### Introduction

This paper aims to discuss Realpolitik of Gender and Religious Discourse in *Iranian Nights* by Tariq Ali and Howard Brenton. Realpolitik can be defined as a political system dealing with the need and situation of a country without considering the ideas of what could be morally wrong or right. With reference to *Iranian Nights* realpolitik is a system that was introduced by colonizers in order to establish their own rule over colonized and to make them Orient/Inferior while keeping their own existence as Occident/Superior, not only to control the wealth of colonized but also to capture and en-cage their soul and to turn their mental condition in to *Nervous Conditions*<sup>6</sup>. This paper aims to cover the politics of religion and politics of gender through the lens of Postcolonialism and aims to highlight that in order to accomplish their aims how west has misrepresented Islam. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* says, "There are westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another western power" (36). Orient/East is a creation of west, in order to make themselves superior they have to justify their "wrongdoings" in a positive frame. "The Orient is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal" (40). The hatred for Muslims in the minds of west is not new rather it is a revenge tale that was started, unfortunately, by Muslims. Europe was once the empire of Muslims and in order to make that empire a tale of bygone days Europe colonized Muslim lands in the name of 'civilization'. Orientalism talks about this revenge and hatred as, "Islam outstripped and outshone Rome cannot have been absent from the mind of any European past or present" (Said 74). This xenophobia of west has led them to concoct such illusions about Islam and East that automatically the binaries of Orient/Occident and Inferior Superior took birth.

The representation of Eastern women as "exotic" and "sex-maniac" is what has been inculcated in the mind of both, East and West. This thing has been inculcated in East through the colonization and in west as being "chosen

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seeds". Scheherazade is an epitome of such an exotic character. "But whatever she is, her skin is dark. And that is where our story starts." (Bhattacharyya 5). This false representation of Eastern woman has raised so many questions on the representation of western women in their literature who is nothing more than a coquettish and a show piece to be decorated in drawing rooms. The aim of this paper is to challenge the Realpolitik of west about religion and gender to establish the actual voice of East without any prejudice and discrimination.

### Literature Review

Postcolonialism can be defined as a study dealing and entailing European era along with American domination and supremacy that continued till 20<sup>th</sup> century leaving far reaching impact on world's political, and socio economic factors by further manipulating the psyches. Edward Said, a renowned Postcolonial critic in his book *Orientalism* talks about binaries created by west, namely Orient and Occident, Inferior and Superior. Orient/Inferior refers to East and Occident/Superior refers to west. The very thing has been inculcated in the minds of west that they are the chosen seeds and are bound to rule while Orientals being naive, meek and having the feminine qualities deserve to be ruled. As Karl Marx says, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (qtd in Said n.p). *Orientalism* can also be taken as an off shoot of Eurocentricism where all the good lies with west and all evils are associated with East.

Orient of Said is Subaltern of Spivak. She argues about the impossibility of subaltern having their own say about their existence. The subaltern cannot speak not because he has no power of articulation but because of the fact that his strings are in the hands of west. The articulation is nothing more than a puppet show where puppet speaks neither less nor more than what is desired by his 'master'. Spivak in her interview says: "If the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern any more" (Chow 36).

In order to establish their own identity and challenging the Realpolitik and hegemony of West, East needs to question the binaries created by West. East needs to shun the very idea that western culture is superior, vibrant and monolithic. From ages, west has represented Muslims especially Arabs as hungry, money mongers and dirty and this is clear in their representation of Walt Disney's animated movie *Aladdin*. As argued by Edward Said in *Orientalism*

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in the cinema. The Arab leader (of marauders, pirates, "native" insurgents) can often be seen snarling at the captured western hero and the blond girl (both of them steeped in wholesomeness), "My men are going to kill you, but—they like to amuse themselves before." He leers suggestively as he speaks: this is a current debasement of Valentino's Sheik. In newsreels or news-photos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world (286).

In Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* this colonized mentality is revealed through the character of Omar. "Omar believed we had been better off under the British and it is a shame that they left" (11-12). This Realpolitik needs to be thrown out from the minds and psyches of colonized lest they should be left in remorse and confusion like Naysha of *Nervous conditions* by Tsitsi Dangerambga, "I was comfortable in England but now I'm whore with dirty habits" (119). Women of East are always given a secondary position by west. As for west they are exotic and this whole incarnation is taken from Scheherazade of *One Thousand and One Nights* but they negated the fact that story narration is a tradition and not lechery. What Scheherazade did through her stories was nothing wrong. Her motive was merely to change the thinking of king towards women-folk. Haraway says:

Stories are always a complex production with many tellers and hearers, not all of them visible or audible. Story-telling is a serious concept, but one happily without the power to claim unique or closed readings...the aesthetic and latent in the examination of story-telling might be pleasure and responsibility in the weaving of tales. Stories are mean to ways of living (qtd. in. Bhattacharyya 33). Each and every bad thing happening in the world is due to the mere presence of Muslims, be it 9/11, terrorism in general or anything.

The simple answer of all the wrong things happening in the world is Muslims and Islam. Even then Orientals are blind followers of west and take it as a dream place. "What did I think of Princeton?...This is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feelings that my life was a film in which I was a star and everything was possible"

(Hamid 2). The aim of this paper is to challenge the Realpolitik of west about religion and gender to establish the actual voice of East without any prejudice and discrimination.

### Chapter 1

POET

Right.Right. Let's get this on a rational level. I'll ask you some questions. If your answers convince me, I will go down on my knees, in shame. I'll pray for forgiveness, plead for mercy, commit myself to a pious life and burn my verses that no one read.

The HOLY MAN stares impassively, no trace of emotion on his face.

...

In the war of believer against believer, with your twelve year-olds dead in the marshes, which ... side... did...God...support?

Silence

You said that the man who will kill me, will go to Heaven. How...do...you...know? Is it not the case, that God alone decides who goes to Heaven or to Hell?

Silence

...

Do your threats actually have anything...to...do...with Islam? Or is it just the same old story, power, terror and Realpolitik?

A silence

And are you sure that you yourself will go to Heaven?

SCHEHERZADE

The Holy Man did not answer. Not because he did not have the answers, but because he saw no point in answering a dead man on leave. Not that the poet had asked all the questions. He did not ask the Holy Man why, in his land, dissident women in prison who were virgins had to be raped because the Holy Man's jailers believed that virgins who die go straight to Heaven (Ali and Brenton 7-8).

The questions put forward by Poet in front of Holy Man are neither the questions that should never be uttered nor they are heretic; rather they are the questions that should be answered to remove all the ambiguities regarding Islam as religion and the misinterpretations that are causing xenophobia among non-Muslims. Galileo Galilee was accused for being a heretic because he defied the existing religious belief and gave demonstrable evidence that Copernicus had been correct. Socrates was forced to drink Hemlock because he questioned the democracy. Salman Rushdie was declared a blasphemer by those who even did not read what he talked about in his book, *Satanic Verses*. And this is how people suffer when they try to break centuries old traditions, customs and clichés. The questions asked by the poet narrate the confusions in the religion of Islam that are created by so-called 'mullahs' and torchbearers of religion. "The orient and Islam have a kind of extra real phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the western expert. From the beginning of western speculation about the orient, the one thing the orient could not do was to represent itself" (Said 283).

In order to satiate the lust for revenge west has monopolized against Islam to such an extent that they have almost turned Islam into fanaticism. West has inculcated in the minds of Eastern that only west is the upholder of equality and superiority. *My Son the Fanatic* by Hanif Kureishi questions the hybridity and fanaticism engrossed by west in the minds of Eastern living in the Western countries so badly that it almost seems as if all negativity lies in Orient and not in Occident. The general concept is that if you have adopted the ways of west you are modern and you deserve to be appreciated but the reality negates it. Living in a land that does not belong to you and neither does it owns you but you are behind it like a fanatic would lead you nowhere but to an abyss and nothingness. "The western materialists hate us,"-Ali said. 'Papa, how can you love something which hates you?' (Kureishi 7). If a person does not own his country how come an alien nation and land can own him? How is it possible to neglect the love bestowed by own relatives and accepting it from strangers? Postcolonial 'identity' has made us question our own existence in our own country and has turned people alien to their own lands at the hands of colonialism.

An Eastern in the West-

I'll sweat, I'll save, I'll do my best

As Americans say, suck it and see

I'll live in Bradford, Yorkshire  
 I'll drink a lot of English beer  
 And I will raise a family  
 Of heroic sons, proud of me  
 Free of prejudice, free of poverty  
 True sons of liberty (Ali and Brenton 11).

In the humdrum of Colonization, Decolonization and Postcolonialism things have mingled up so badly that colonized have almost intended to forget their own identity and roots rather they have accepted the western ideology to such an extent that almost have become a westernized person with eastern looks. Hybrids returning to their roots become fanatics and leave their family in awe. *Iranian Nights* is a vivid example of this when son argues with father over preaching of Islam in every nook and corner and asking people to embrace this religion for good of the whole world so that all the evils would be wiped away.

“FATHER

...and when you have closed down the brothels and casinos in Mayfair, you bloody fool, where do you think the leaders of our Muslim world will go?” (Ali and Brenton 13).

Through the character of Scheherazade Eastern women are portrayed. Taken from *One Thousand and One Nights*, the story-teller, a sex maniac and exotic lady who traps king, though he is her husband. Colonizers invaded colonized in order to civilize them, they hatch for reason, either in the form of being less civilized or not giving their ladies equal rights but intend to forget that Islam is the only religion to give equal rights to its women unlike Christianity where women is the source of cardinal sin. “The story of Salome and her mesmerizing Dance of the Seven Veils has become a standard trope of Orientalism, a piece of domesticated exotica that confirms Western prejudices about “women” because it is produced by those prejudices, is in fact an exercise in cultural tautology” (Garber 1992). Who actually has turned Scheherazade in to an exotic creature? Who has labeled eastern women as sex maniac? Who has described them as a creature that is worth of nothing but abuses on her character? The Postcolonial mentality is vivid enough through the representation of Jasmine in *Aladdin*<sup>7</sup>. Jasmine despite being a princess is shown to be trapped in cruel oriental marriage laws which are meant to suppress oriental women. The females portrayed are extremely sensuous and exotic. They live in harems, wear a lot of makeup and know the art of seducing men. Now the question that needs to be asked is who has actually turned Jasmine in to such a character? The misinterpretation of Harem again gives an edge to west so that they can monopolize east. For west harem is a place full of illicit relations but in fact it is not place where emperors have kept their keeps rather a place where so many people live together but the Realpolitik of Harem is different in the minds of both Orient and Occident. “The fixation on the veil, the harem, excision, and polygamy made Arab women symbols of a region and a religion that were at once exotic, violent, and inferior.” (Amreihn.p)

How west portrays its female characters is not so different from the way it represents of Orient women. Maggie of *A Mill on the Floss* is a fallen lady, Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* as “mad woman in attic”, Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a lady struggling with her psychological conditions and the treatment of Alison in *Look Back in Anger* by her husband Jimmy Porter are as clear examples of their portrayal as blood on white carpet. Instead of dealing with realpolitik of their mentality, west is incorporating every evil in East. In this Orient Occident mystery, Occident has influenced us so badly that orient has intended to forget that he too has an identity and in fact Occident needs to be questioned not the Orient. “Islam and the Arabs have their own representations, too, and we shall treat them here as they occur in that fragmentary- yet powerfully and ideologically coherent- persistence, a far less frequently discussed one, into which, in the United States, traditional European Orientalism disbursed itself?” (Said 285).

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<sup>7</sup>2. Not from the One Thousand and One Nights. Or at least, not really. We associate it with that collection because the story has been added to the Nights in translation as a sort of honorary extra tale (or ‘orphan tale’). The Aladdin story was added to the collection by a French translator, Antoine Galland, in the early eighteenth century. Although Galland heard the tale from an Arabian storyteller, the Aladdin story is firmly set in China (so not the Middle East at all, but the Far East). The tale had nothing to do with the original One Thousand and One Nights tales, and doesn’t appear in any of the manuscripts. But, since Galland added it to his version, it has become arguably the most famous story (not) in the Arabian Nights.

The Colonial past and Postcolonial present has affected not only the ideals of Colonized/Orients but also their psyches and has left them in the labyrinth of hybrid-making peace-with-past. "The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent" (qtd. in. Dangarembga).

### Conclusion

Thus, this paper identifies the Realpolitik of west that has given the position of subaltern to east and the questions put forward by the poet in *Iranian Nights* are clear representation of binaries being reversed and put to their 'actual' places. West has taken east to a place where following the footnotes of west is considered to be the ultimate reason of success without even realizing the fact that west is no friend. There are always vested interests of colonizers and once they are achieved they make colonized nation a pariah. Henry John Temple says "Therefore I say that it is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."

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