

# Introduction to culture and imperialism



Introduction to Culture and Imperialism Edward Said Culture is one of the things that elude an accurate definition. Some of the various well-known definitions are cited by Said in his various works. For instance: “ Culture is the learned, accumulated experience of the communities, and it consists of socially transmitted patterns of behavior. ” The final analysis of definition boils down to “ socially transmitted patterns of behavior”, and makes more sense, though like other definitions, it too cannot be taken as exact and conclusive. Said also cites anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s definition, An ordered system of meanings and symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place, and social system is the pattern of social interaction itself. ” This definition too, has partial relevance to what culture amounts to. Said seems more in agreement with Matthew Arnold who regards culture as, “ each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought”. Edward Said’s entire professional life was devoted to the teaching of literature. As his critical outlook was influenced by his colonial social background, he could not help looking for imperialistic implications in literature.

Imperialism too does not lend itself to a complete conclusive definition, though it is more easily comprehensible than the word culture. For a meaningful discussion, Solomon Modell’s definition of imperialism makes a good promise. He says, “ Imperialism is a policy of extending a country’s power beyond its own borders for the purpose of exploiting other lands and other people by establishing economic, social and political control over them. ” Said gives an updated version of Modell’s definition in the following words” Imperialism means the practice, the theory and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan centre that rules a distant territory. ” It is obvious that the

interaction in imperialism takes place between the dominating and dominated nation. That interaction never develops in friendship, because of distrust and contempt on either side. The dominated nation never accepts the ideology and attitude of dominating nation. The best example is the Indo-Pak Sub-Continent, for instance, about 200 years of British rule could not bring friendship between Indians and British government.

Literature not doubt is the mirror of culture. Said deplores the general attitude of the critics and readers who never care to look at the cultural aspects of the works of fiction, like the works of Carlyle, Ruskin or Even Dickens. On the other hand, he admires Conrad's persistence as he forecasts the unstoppable unrest and misrule of the Latin American republics and singles out North America's particular way of influencing conditions in a decisive, yet barely visible way. He praised "The Heart of Darkness" by Conrad.

Speaking of the interaction between imperialistic regime and colonized nation, he conceives culture as a protective enclosure where imperialist should stop to check his politics before he enters the door. "I found it a challenge not to see culture in this way", says Edward Said. Since the culture includes ideology and attitudes of a nation, any effort on the part of imperialist to subdue the culture of a nation invokes violent resistances. Palestine, Kashmir and Iraq are apt illustrations of the resistance, which results in blood acts of fighting and terrorism.

Education, is the field, through which imperialist finds easiest access to the culture of the subjugated nation. As most of the third world countries are

backward in education, imperialists launch so-called programs for educational development, to achieve their goal. British did this by setting up state-governed schools and colleges, the curriculum was designed to produce minor officials in cheap English dress, speaking shaky English. Introduction to culture and imperialism is an accurate appraisal of current world scenario around us. It is a warning for people of the world against imperialistic approach of US.

Cold War has made US the sole power, being unprecedented. During the Cold War, US had to contribute for the socio-economic development of the third world countries. Its attitude was soft and pliant. It had to respect the mandate of the UNO. In the case of US aggression, the victim state could invoke the intervention of USSR, which US could afford to ignore. With the engineered fall of USSR, US emerged as the self-appointed lord of the world. Muslim militants groups were created, trained, organized and financed to cause the fall of USSR. These groups were made to believe that it was the war between Islam and communism.

Heavy consignments of sophisticated arms were supplied to those warriors. Pakistan also had to pay a heavy price by playing a major part in the downfall of USSR. Islam came to be the next target of the sole Super Power of the world, as a potential challenge in the years to come. The oil-rich Iraq has already been laid waist in the ruthless hunt of WMDs. Afghanistan that spearheaded the war against communism, is now main target in the hunt of Osama. But the power-drunk Super Power does not bother about justifications for whatever it does, so long as it remains at the top. UNO is also helpless in this regard.

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US adopted the preemption policy. Even terrorism is the exclusive prerogative of the sole Super Power. The prerogative includes defining nuclear proliferation, and therefore Iran is presently on the hit list, whereas Pakistan likely to be the next target, gets an occasional growl from US administration. During 19th century immense power was concentrated in Britain and France as a result of industrialization. It was unprecedented and more formidable than power of Rome, Baghdad, Spain and Constantinople. In the later years, US also came up with Britain and France and that was peak of West domination.

The rise was so fast that rate of acquisition of foreign territory had risen up to 247, 000 square miles per year in 1914. During this time, US was forwarded as an empire. After annexation of North American territory, Plans were set afoot through intervention to Philippines, the Caribbean, Central America, the Middle East, Vietnam and Korea. Edward Said clearly labels as Imperialism whatever US is doing around the world. He says, “ The goal of the US policy is to bring a world increasingly subject to the rule of law, and it is the United States, which organizes the peace and defines the law.

United States imposes the international interests by setting the ground rules for economic development and military development across the planet. ”

Edward Said pins his hopes on a gradual development of awareness, culminating in a formidable, well-organized resistance that would eventually force US to think wise before meddling with sovereignty of other states, but this solution depends upon the numbers of factors which may or may not come together and it may take ages before they come.