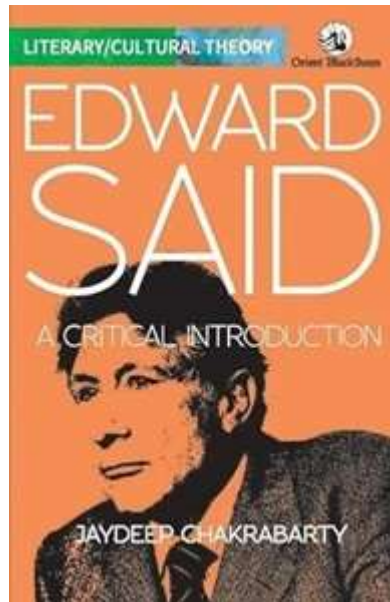


**“Edward Said -A Critical Introduction” by Jaydeep Chakrabarty
Sapna Dogra**



***Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* | Literary / Cultural Theory |
Jaydeep Chakrabarty | Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan (2023) |
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An Introduction to the key concepts of Edward Said.

Jaydeep Chakrabarty's *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* is a part of the Orient BlackSwan series that aims to provide "concise and lucid introductions to a range of key concepts and theorists in contemporary literary theory" (p. i). The book is meant for the students of humanities and social sciences to help them introduce to the theorist Edward Said and teach them how to read literary texts with the help of critical tools.

Edward Said is one of the key figures in the postcolonial theory. The book under review provides a clear, jargon-free, insightful overview of Said's life and contributions. Not only does it elucidate theoretically engaging outlines of Said's major and widely influential works, such

as *Orientalism, The World, the Text, and the Critic, Culture and Imperialism* but also engages with fundamental concepts of the Saidian body of work. It provides all the pertinent information about Said and his works and also acts as a primer on poststructuralism and postcolonial theories, particularly those of Derrida and Foucault.

In the Preface, the author points out three major points on which most general introductions to Said's works are incomplete. Firstly, the authors sideline Said's political interventions with sole emphasis on the academic part, secondly, Said's works before *Orientalism* are never the focus and lastly, "biographical details in these works are often not adequate to help contextualise Said and his works effectively" (p.vii). Hence, Prof. Chakrabarty aims to address these gaps in his Introduction to Said.

Chapter one focuses on Said's autobiography *Out of Place: A Memoir*. I personally enjoyed reading this chapter the most. The chapter establishes Said in the contexts that produced all of his works. Chakrabarty believes that,

While books dealing with a thinker's intellectual and academic life often attempt to keep away from their personal life, such an approach will be epistemologically as well as ethically flawed in the case of a thinker like Said. His life and works are seamlessly woven together, almost always, by one-on-one correspondence, so much so that without some insights into the major signposts of his life, his works will remain only half intelligible" (2).

One cannot but fully agree with the author here. I never knew that Said was also a musical maestro and has to his credit four books on music.

Chapter two looks at the relation between an author and his or her work in general and Said and his work in particular. The chapter looks at Said's first two books: *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* and *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. Prof. Chakrabarty opines that "It was part of Said's agenda to establish Conrad as a responsible writer" (p. 35). The rest of the chapters go on to explain how. The author also states that,

The point that I am trying to make here is that there is an uncanny reciprocity, call it intertwined affiliations if you will, between Said's literary critical works on the one hand and his political works in text and the world on the other" (p. 48).

Chapter three discusses *Orientalism* as a significant text of colonialism and reasons why it has remained widely influential. Prof. Chakrabarty says about *Orientalism* that "The entire book is an attempt to show that Orientalism was not only an academic field of knowledge but also one

that was deeply implicated in the field of cultural politics of European imperialism" (p. 61). He also says "There is a nefarious link between Orientalism, colonialism and neocolonialism on one hand and racism on the other" (p. 83).

The fourth chapter is based on Said's belief that text cannot be fully extricated from the context and is insidiously a product of the world out of which it emerges. Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* is the topic of discussion in this chapter. Prof. Chakrabarty tries to fathom Said's anxiety and disapproval of traditional aesthetic readings and "the loss of worldly engagement in traditional literature studies as well as contemporary theory" (p. 93).

Chapters five and six look at the politics of imperialism vis-a-vis Palestine. Prof. Chakrabarty explains concepts like 'contrapuntal reading' and how it can be used as a tool to understand authors like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Albert Camus, E M Forster, etc.

The book is well-brought out with no errors. It also has a glossary of important terms like 'Agency', 'Canon', and 'Imaginative Geography' and provides a list of 'Suggested Readings' that would be very beneficial to the students. By making Said's writings available to a broad audience, this book aims to avoid bracketing them under the strict guidelines of postcolonial theory. It's a good book. I plan to read it again and will surely share it with my students.