

	<p><b><i>Our Heritage</i></b>  <b>ISSN: 0474-9030 Vol.68 No.41 (2020)</b>  <b>Special Issue on</b>  <b>“New Dimensions in English Language and Literature”</b>  <b>Special Issue Editors</b>  <b>Dr. K. Kaviarasu   Ms. K. Selvi</b>  <b>Ms. R. Udhayanila   Ms. S. Ashwini Selvakumari</b></p>	
---	---	---

## **Scrutinizing the Idea of Intellectualism in the Light of Edward Said’s Representations of the Intellectuals**

*Drisya K*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, NSS College, Pandalam, Kerala  
drisyananda@gmail.com

### ***Abstract***

The paper presents the general relevance of the topic ‘intellectualism’ and how the idea differs particularly in the Indian context from the Western attitude. It gives a detailed analysis of the intellectual concept of Edward Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* and investigates the transformation of the intellectual figure in the contemporary society. It is a reading on Said’s post-colonial concept of intellectual politics and of his ideology of intellectualism. The notion about the role of the public intellectual is reconsidered here by imparting a new philosophical framework that can shed light on the intellectual condition in the contemporary world and delivers a renewed outlook on our human community.

Key words: Intellectualism, Post Colonialism, Edward Said, Ideology

For centuries, intellectuals have made a large scale involvement and contribution to the empowerment and progression of our society. Intellectuals have been responsible for epitomizing the lower strata and the advancement of many social strategies that would favour the less privileged and the less advantaged. Most prominently, the intellectuals are accountable for unveiling the truth and raising voice against the deceptions and lies. However in our contemporary society the so-called intellectuals stand as a figure amenable for the criticism of corruptions in our social, political and global system. In this context the significance of the study on the role and function of an intellectual in a society deserves much attention.

### ***Our Heritage***

**Volume No.68 | Issue No.41**

**ISSN: 0474-9030**

**UGC CARE Listed Journal**

**<https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/issue/view/53>**

**Special Issue on  
“New Dimensions in English Language and Literature”**

Apart from Edward Said, many renowned writers like Julian Benda, Gramsci, Bourdieu, and Emerson also deal with the same subject on the dogma of intellectualism and define what an intellectual is. Nevertheless, it is Edward Said, the father of post-colonial studies, who has proposed a more political tone to the concept of the public intellectual in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1993), a series of lectures. He identifies the increasing responsibilities of the public intellectual and specifies what shouldn't be an intellectual rather than what should be. Said's politics is left-wing, liberationist, and nationalitarian and it is always unquestionably different from those of most of the other post-colonialist writers and interlocutors.

The primary aim of this article is to focus on the transformation of the figure of intellectual in coetaneous scenario through his monumental text *Representations of the Intellectual*. It is in these lectures that Said explores on what it means to be a true intellectual and what an intellectual should do to maintain a moral edge in their approaches to social problems and issues.

In the introductory part, Said emphasizes the fact that there is no unwavering guidance for the true secular intellectual. The intellectual epitomises an image of what it means to be an intellectual by representing an idea to the public. In the following six chapters, Said enunciates a vision of the ideal intellectual as “exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power” (p. xvi). In “Representations of the Intellectual”, Said's first of six Reith Lectures, Edward Said examines, throughout history how intellectuals have been defined by academics, sociologists and writers.

The title essay draws a sharp distinction between the conceptions of the intellectual developed by Antonio Gramsci and Julien Benda. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, activist, journalist and brilliant political philosopher, writes in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971) that “all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9). Gramsci himself discerns between two types of intellectuals based on the performance of the intellectual function. According to Gramsci (1971):

The traditional intellectuals such as teachers, priests, and administrators, who continue to do the same thing from generation to generation and the organic intellectuals who are directly connected to classes or enterprises that used intellectuals to consolidate interests, gain more power and get more control. (p. 4)

The organic intellectuals are actively involved in society by constantly struggling to modify minds, extend markets whereas the traditional intellectuals are unconnected with social change, and occupy positions designed to conserve the traditional processes in society.

Julien Benda, in his 1927 work *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, defines intellectuals as “a tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscience of mankind” (p. 43). Benda uses the religious term ‘clerics’ to describe the intellectuals. Gramsci's analysis of the intellectual as an individual who accomplishes a particular set of functions in the society is closer to the reality than that of Benda's. According to Gramsci (1971), “everyone who works in any field connected either with the production or distribution of knowledge is an intellectual” (p. 9). The central fact, for Said (1993), is “the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public” (p. 11). It is the intellectual vocation to advance human freedom and knowledge. The two important features of the intellectual activity are knowing the proper usage of language and the point of time to mediate in language. The intellectual should place oneself in between “loneliness and alignment” (p. 22) and thus one can unveil and bang the stereotypes in which each society is confined to. Said states:

***Our Heritage***

**Volume No.68 | Issue No.41**

**ISSN: 0474-9030**

**UGC CARE Listed Journal**

**<https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/issue/view/53>**

**Special Issue on  
“New Dimensions in English Language and Literature”**

. . . the intellectual is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. (p. 23)

In his second lecture, “Holding Nations and Traditions at Bay”, Edward Said scrutinizes the role of intellectuals from different national and cultural backgrounds, and the alternatives that confront them when choosing to align with the authority or with the underdog. He observes the problems of allegiance, loyalty, and nationalism for intellectuals, and argues that their role is primarily to question the authority.

Julien Benda in *The Treason of the Intellectuals* enunciates that the universal space of intellectuals are neither bound by any geographical boundaries nor swayed by any ethnic identity. They exist in a kind of “universal space” (1927, p. 25). Benda considers only Europeans as intellectuals.

One of the main functions of a language community in each society that is dominated by already existed habits of expression is “to preserve the status quo, and to make certain that things go smoothly, unchanged, and unchallenged” (p. 27). Said contemplates this as the specific problem of the intellectual. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold pronounces that the State is the best self of the nation, and a national culture is “the expression of the best that has been thought and said” (p. viii). These selves and thoughts are represented and articulated by what Arnold calls “men of culture” whom Said means intellectuals. Their thoughts and judgements are beneficial to not only the individual classes but also the whole society.

In the lecture, “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals”, Edward Said evaluates intellectuals both as exiles and as people on the peripheries of their own society. How an expatriate instigates one’s thinking and ruminates on representations of the intellectual as the permanent exile is assessed. According to Said, the intellectual should always wear the veil of the exile if not literally, then at least metaphorically. The expatriate amateur intellectual is someone who is not indebted to deeply engrained ideological or political interests of the authority.

Said exemplifies the intellectual as an ‘amateur’ and draws the distinction between a professional and an amateur intellectual. He transcribes the complications of negotiating the cosmopolitan and the national commitments of the intellectuals and of the experience of expatriate and marginalization. He also addresses the polarity of professionalism and amateurism, holding to the side of the ‘amateurs’, without disavowing membership in academic institutions.

Said discusses the four pressures through which professionalism challenges the intellectual’s ingenuity and will. Among them, the first is “specialization” (p. 75). In the present education system, as one goes higher, one’s area of knowledge is getting limited and one’s general culture is sacrificed to a set of canonical ideas and authorities. This specialization diminishes the sense of excitement and discovery of the intellectual. The second pressure is “expertise and the cult of expert” (p. 76). The academic humanists and experts undergo “political correctness” (p. 77), that is, subservience to authorities. The third pressure is “the inevitable drift towards power and authority in its adherents, towards the requirements and prerogatives of power, and towards being directly employed by it” (p. 80). The fourth pressure of the intellectual is “to try to deal with the impingements of modern professionalization by representing a different set of values and prerogatives under the name of amateurism” (p. 82).

***Our Heritage***

**Volume No.68 | Issue No.41**

**ISSN: 0474-9030**

**UGC CARE Listed Journal**

**<https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/issue/view/53>**

**Special Issue on**  
**“New Dimensions in English Language and Literature”**

In his fifth lecture, “Speaking Truth to Power”, Edward Said regards the basic question for the intellectual “how one speaks the truth and whether there is some universal or rational set of principles that can govern how one speaks and writes” (p. 88). He assesses the difficulties and sometimes loneliness confronted by the intellectual when questioning authority. He discusses that in “speaking the truth to power” intellectuals should exhibit a more righteous stand.

In an article published in Al-Ahram Egyptian on-line weekly, Hazem Kandil proposes that Said is not inviting for a religious criticism of everyone and everything as evil, neither is he calling intellectuals to become wholly disagreeable. “Total quiescence or total rebelliousness” (p. 69) are not the only weighing alternatives. What he expects of intellectuals is that they should project a better state of affairs, defend consistency and fairness, resist authority and avoid subservience. “The goal of speaking the truth is...to try to induce a change in the moral climate” (p. 99-100).

The intellectuals are not professionals denatured by the fetters of power but the intellectuals with a moral more principled stand that facilitates them in speaking truth to power. He concludes the chapter by stating “the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual” (p. 101). Therefore, Said’s deletion of the other worldly, private and empyreal context denotes that the secular critical intellectual’s function is boosted by one’s competence to be ‘in the world’.

Edward Said reflects how far an intellectual should partake in the public domain in the final lecture “Gods That Always Fail”. He observes the quandary of faithfulness to a cause and the problems encountered by those who publicly show dissension. For Said “the hardest aspect of being an intellectual, he says, is to represent what you profess through your work and interventions, without turning into an institution or acting at the behest of a system or method” (p. 121).

Said comments that “the true intellectual is a secular being” (p. 120). Secular intellectual contemplates “thinking of oneself, one’s views, one’s rectitude, one’s stated positions are all-important” (p. 113) as the appalling danger. An intellectual can either actively represents the truth to the best of one’s ability or passively tolerating an authority or a patron to lead one, but “for the secular intellectual, *those* gods always fail” (p. 121). The intellectual should walk around and should have some space to talk back to authority.

Said observes, in today’s world unquestioning subservience to authority is one of the paramount impediments to a dynamic and moral intellectual life. The intellectual must always create space to grow, change, discover new things, or re-discover what has been discarded. In Said’s opinion, “the hardest thing to do as an intellectual is to be critical, to adopt a rhetorical style that is the verbal equivalent of carpet-bombing” (p. 118). One cannot be an intellectual if one is endeavouring to serve and please a god uncritically and there is no sort of universalism at all. Such an intellectual goes in silence and searches for new gods to serve when the earlier patrons are driven away.

Ignoring the destructive results made by the western empire, the so called intellectuals in the post-colonial world consider the West and the U.S. policy as ‘the new god’ and ‘a reference point’. They attack its critics by belittling their tradition, disfiguring their history and heightening their weaknesses and officially declared them as antagonists as they do with the Arabs. Such intellectuals achieve world-wide acclaim and earn accolades whereas many of the secular intellectuals, who constitute a minority including the most gifted writers, artists, political commentators, have been hounded into silence or exile

To be an exile is to be without a nation, a nationality, a home, and security. Nationalism, in Said's estimation, is a God that always fails because it reduces human experience and lines of solidarity between

***Our Heritage***

**Volume No.68 | Issue No.41**

**ISSN: 0474-9030**

**UGC CARE Listed Journal**

**<https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/issue/view/53>**

**Special Issue on  
“New Dimensions in English Language and Literature”**

people to territories and borders that in reality carve up the world in unproductive and destructive ways. To be an exile is to relate to all the people regardless of their country of citizenship or place of birth. This catholicity of thought, this openness to different forms of social experimentation, allows for the type of worldliness, spontaneity and plurality are the characteristics of Said.

As the historical context in each nation and continent is different, separate consideration is required to the intellectuals in each nation and continent and the homogenisation of the intellectual space as universal has been eroded. But what an intellectual can do is to associate the experience of a particular race or nation with the sufferings of others in order to universalize the disastrous situation and thereby giving a greater human scope.

In the historic past, the intellectuals have been the part and parcel of the society. They are free-floating intellectuals. In the twenty first century the number of secular amateur organic intellectuals has become extensively dwindled owing to the grip of some enticing variables such as denomination and power. These factors tempt the intellectual ultimately to embrace patronage and thus the so-called intellectual personage becomes disfigured. Besides many of the secular intellectuals in the post-colonial nations, who constitute a minority including the most gifted writers, artists, social activists, political commentators, have been hounded into silence due to the psychological invasion of the imperial superpowers. As cultures are too amalgamated, their contents and histories are too mutually dependent and mixed to split up into large and mostly conceptual antithesis ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’. The construction of fictions like “East” and “West” by the Western imperial nations are mere mythical preoccupations which enslave the pre-colonized Eastern nations once again through neo-colonialism.

### **References:**

- [1]. Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. London: OUP, 2006. Print.
- [2]. Benda, Julien. *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. Trans. Richard Aldington. London: Norton, 1980. Print.
- [3]. Foucault, Michel F. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” *Language, Countermemory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Eds. Michel F. Foucault and Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. New York: Cornell UP, 1980. Print.
- [4]. Gramsci, Antonio. *The Prison Notebooks: Selections*. Trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971. Print.
- [5]. Kandil, Hazem. “Crusty, eloquent, fantastically courageous and angry...” *Al-Ahram Weekly*. 783 (2006): n pag. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.
- [6]. Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. New York: Vintage, 1996. Print.

***Our Heritage***

**Volume No.68 | Issue No.41**

**ISSN: 0474-9030**

**UGC CARE Listed Journal**

**<https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/issue/view/53>**