



BRITISH REPRESENTATION OF INDIANS AS ORIENTAL 'OTHER' IN FORSTER'S *PASSAGE TO INDIA*

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ABSTRACT



E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* portrays a colonial India under British imperialism, before its liberation from the occidental colonial rule. Forster portrays the colonizer's ideology of superiority of White race and its culture and the constructed inferiority of India and Indians in this novel. *A Passage to India* like every colonial discourse privileges the Europe and the European as 'Us', while the Indians and their culture are presented as inferior and 'Other'. It highlights the impact of 'Englishness' on the indigenous culture and identity. It also exposes the British inherent preconception toward Indians depicting the English characters as awesomely racially prejudiced, priggish, and inhumanly snobbish to the native inhabitants.

E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* represents the dichotomy between the Indian and British cultural aspects focusing the reciprocal relationship between the British colonies and the Indians in Chandapore and highlighting the contrast between the Indian and the European ideology. Throughout the novel, the barriers of inter-racial friendship in a colonial context are explored vividly posing the question of whether it is possible for an Englishman and an Indian to ever be friends, at least within the context of British colonialism.

Keywords: *India, British Imperialism, Culture, Identity, Inter-Racial Friendship.*



One of the most notable critiques comes from literary professor Edward Said, who referenced *A Passage to India* in both *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism*. In his discussion about allusions to the British Empire in early 20th century novels, Said suggests that though the work did subvert typical views of colonization and colonial rule in India, it also fell short of outright condemning either nationalist movements in India or imperialism. Of Forster's attitude toward colonizer-colonized relationships, Said says:

"Forster found a way to use the mechanism of the novel to elaborate on the already existing structure of attitude and reference without changing it. This structure permitted one to feel affection for and even intimacy with some Indians and India generally, but made one see Indian politics as the charge of the British, and culturally refused a privilege to India nationalism."

Said suggests that Forster deals with the question of British-India relationships by separating Muslims and Hindus in the narrative. He says Forster connects Islam to Western values and attitudes while suggesting that Hinduism is chaotic and orderless, and subsequently uses Hindu characters as the background to the main narrative. He also identifies the failed attempt at friendship between Aziz and Fielding as a reinforcement of the perceived cultural distance between the Orient and the West. The inability of the two men to begin a meaningful friendship is indicative of what Said suggests is the irreconcilable otherness of the Orient, something that has originated from the West and also limits Western readers in how they understand the Orient. Edward Said said in his seminal work *Orientalism* that "The Orient is... its [Europe's] cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."

"I know all about him. I don't know him."-This statement, spoken by Fielding about Dr Aziz, is a fair reflection of the general western perception about the Orient; that region or imagined space that has come to represent the concept of otherness in the minds of Westerners. Forster being a representative of the middle class is well known to its norms and characteristics which, according to Forster, reflect

England of that time. He uses Englishness as a standard, thus almost absolutely presenting to the uniqueness, singularity, and idiosyncrasy of each culture. Forster categorizes different behaviours, habits and values in terms of disparity. He demonstrates the idea that English and Indians will remain two different cultures. Writing about India from the perspective of humanism, Forster is eager to uncover the British void claim of superiority over the Indians. India was thought to be like a baby or a wild nation that needed every care and heed, so certain models were employed for their reforms. Mrs. Moore appeared as an evangelist; Fielding as a utilitarian and Ronny, a city magistrate acted as Victorian gentlemen. All of them attempted to transform the Indians but their attitude on certain occasions ruin their efforts or they were product of English middle class who being unemotional and inert, could not win the Indians' heart which resulted in chaos, offences, aggressions and misunderstanding. In *A Passage to India*, Forster cleverly tries to extend this analysis to examine not only the attitudes of English, but also of the Indians. India is presented as a micro-society in which the British actively attempt to recreate their home society in India. The Anglo-Indian characters of this novel can be categorized into two groups- in one group, there are characters like City Magistrate Ronny Heaslop, Mrs. Callendar (wife of the Civil Surgeon), who look down upon the Indians and consider themselves to be superior to the Indians. On the other hand, there are characters like Mr. Cyril Fielding, Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela Quested who have liberal views about the Indians. There are also some Indian characters like Dr. Aziz, Hamidullah, Godbole and Mahmoud Ali. Through the encounters of these characters among each other we get the cultural difference that obstructs the path of friendship between East and West.

At the beginning of the novel, Aziz is scornful of the English, wishing only to consider them comically or ignore them completely. Yet the intuitive connection Aziz feels with Mrs. Moore in the mosque opens him to the possibility of friendship with Fielding. Through the first half of the novel, Fielding and Aziz represent a positive model of liberal humanism. Forster suggests that British rule in India



could be successful and respectful if only English and Indians treated each other as Fielding and Aziz treat each other—as worthy individuals who connect through frankness, intelligence, and good will.

Forster demonstrates that cultural differences, which come to the light during and in the aftermath of the trial, make it hard for an English-Indian friendship to survive, even in the presence of mutual respect. Working with Indians, Fielding realises the futility of trying to bridge the gap between himself and the Indians. Adela's accusation that Aziz attempted to assault her and her subsequent disavowal of this accusation at the trial—Aziz and Fielding's friendship falls apart. The strains on their relationship are external in nature, as Aziz and Fielding both suffer from the tendencies of their cultures. Aziz tends to let his imagination run away with him and to let suspicion harden into a grudge. Fielding suffers from an English literalism and rationalism that blind him to Aziz's true feelings and make Fielding too stilted to reach out to Aziz through conversations or letters. Furthermore, their respective Indian and English communities pull them apart through their mutual stereotyping. As we see at the end of the novel, even the landscape of India seems to oppress their friendship. Forster's final vision of the possibility of English-Indian friendship is a pessimistic one, yet it is qualified by the possibility of friendship on English soil, or after the liberation of India. As the landscape itself seems to imply at the end of the novel, such a friendship may be possible eventually, but "not yet."

Forster assumes that relationships between the different races do not work smoothly in the imperial India. These are the problems of status, career and power that divide the British from the native people. There are in addition, prejudices and feelings of superiority of the British. Turton, Callendar, and Ronny Heaslop have to deal with Indians, since they cannot avoid them completely, however they keep these relations as minimal as possible. Because of this rudeness and intolerance, Aziz and his friends have to suffer a lot at their hands. They are deprived of better jobs and they are treated very inhumanly (David 19-23). But there is still a group that willingly wishes to develop relations with the Indians. Adela, Mrs. Moore and Fielding do not

care for the so called racial differences. These three good people's courage is appreciable in extending their goodwill to the Indians but, their efforts prove fruitless because their imperialistic, colonial outlook and psyche created doubts in the Indians' mind. Hence the oriental Indians were not certain whether to trust the English or not. At the beginning of the novel, when Mahmud Ali and Dr. Aziz were discussing as "to whether or not it is possible to be friends with an English".(Forster 31). Such doubt increased and reached its climax at the time when Aziz was accused of raping Adela. The accusation put at dagger drawn all the violent and opposing element. The high capitalism, triumphant history and sophisticated social and political system had turned the occidental British peoples' heads.

They thought that they were superior and the most cultured race. Their mentality and psyche has best been exposed in the novel, *A Passage to India*. Ronny, Mr. and Mrs. McBryde and Major Callendar are the English who are the foremost in torturing the Indians like Aziz, Mahmood Ali, Hamidullah and Amrit Rao. Mrs. Moore, Adela and Fielding, though good natured people, they could not shake the hard barriers of imperialism and colonialism which resulted in separation and misunderstanding and doubts.

It is however important to know that the land of India also contributed a lot in forming the psyche of both the Indians and the English. The railway line, the muddy hut, the Marabar caves, the dead and quite granite, crashing of the sun on the backs and the dome of blending tints sprouting hatred and aversion, draw a line between the two races; the East and the West, the colonizers and the colonized which changed the psyche and temperaments of the Indians and the English. This land confuses Mrs. Moore and Adela who in trying to understand the natives are lost. Forster, being a writer of colonial era seems to support the British occupation. But being a humanist, he criticizes the rude behaviour of English officials.

Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate, seems a typical English official when he says: "well... I am the sun dried bureaucrat, no doubt; still I don't like to see an English girl left smoking with two Indians". (66). Ronny and Fielding came to India with the mind



that they would settle in India but soon they are tainted with the same colours of pride and insularity. Ronny becomes very cruel to the Indians and soon he cries that he is not there to be pleasant to the Indians but to rule over the nation. Mrs. Moore's first meeting with Aziz in the mosque develops understanding. But Ronny destroys it. Ronny's attitude is the product of the deep-rooted prejudice which he was harboring in their minds against the Indians. He never had good opinion about the Indians; particularly he was very biased to Dr. Aziz. He considers him impertinent and insulting. He does not lose any chance of humiliating the Indians. In his conversation to Mr. Fielding, his psyche is exposed when he speaks that Dr. Aziz is a bounder and he can't see an English woman smoking with him (65-66). When Ronny interrogates his mother, his words reflect his psyche that the status of English is like a brutal master who attempts to look down upon the local:

"Did you gather Aziz was well-disposed?"

Ignorant of the force of this question, she replied, "Yes, quite, after the first moment."

"I meant, generally that sort of thing?" (53).

Ronny announces "India isn't home" and relies on "phrases and arguments that he had picked up from older officials, and he did not feel quite sure of himself" to silence his mother and convince her of his adopted new logic (54). Adela, too, notices the change in Ronny. "India had developed sides of his character that she had never admired "His self-complacency, his psyche, his lack of subtlety" (96). The colony changes the personality of the colonizer in almost every aspect, even aesthetic appreciation. When Ronny first meets Aziz, he speaks out, "he knew the type, he knew all the types, and this was the spoilt westernized" (Forster 93). Ronny was no way ready to accept the Indians. At the party, he wants to tell him that he knew the Indians what sort of people they were and he knew it how to manipulate such people (Bhupal 74). His mentality and psyche is even more exposed when he tells his mother that now "Now I prefer smoke in the club among my own sort" (Forster 23). Mrs. Moore rebukes her son for his snobbish attitude towards the natives but he retorts: "We are not here for the purposes of having pleasantly.... We are here to do

justice and keep the peace." (69). To Ronny, behaving pleasingly to the inhabitant is "a side issue" (68). Crews discovers his problems, and that is that he is not happy with the Mahmud Ali, Aziz's friend also suffered at the hands of Ronny, complaining about the haughty behavior of Ronny, he complains about the magistrate who insults him in the court. The Indians had later understood the fact that the English were working on a pre-planned way. (34). In Mahmud Ali's views, all the English are the same in their approaches towards Indians. The only difference that they have are that some of them are red-nosed while the others don't have. Some speaks too much while the others take bribe. They are all the same. Hence, Mr. Turton announces that "Heaslop's a sahib; he's the type we want, he's one of us" (47). During the trial scene, Ronny acts as a martyr because of the ill-treatment of Adela. He turns vindictive and takes the assault as the stain on English in India, "but now it come straight from his heart. He seemed to appeal for their protection on the insult that had befallen him" (Forster 169). He is bent upon making Aziz responsible for the incident in the Marabar caves. Aziz would have been fallen victim to Ronny's wrath and revenge if Adela had not changed her claim. Nevertheless, he exhibits his psyche to the fullest extent by behaving so impolitely to the natives. Obviously, the powerful discourse of the colony guarantees the generation of people who are "exactly the same" in terms of their ideologies and practices. Beer rightly argues that every human act in the East is stained 'with officialdom and that where there is officialdom every human relation suffers and in officialdom', man feels high and treats others with indifference and haughtiness (28) and Ronny is the mouthpiece of this system who very bluntly displays these traits of imperialism and officialdom.

Major Callendar is the civil Surgeon in Chandrapore and he is Aziz's boss in the Minto Hospital. Major is also very biased to the Indian especially he treats Aziz very badly. During the trial, he tries to prove Aziz as criminal by stopping Adela's confession at the court for medical reasons. The English's psyche and mentality emanates from these lines when the Major echoed his hatred against the Indians: "Swine, I should think so, ' He arranged 'A



Bridge party' for Adela and Mrs. Moore to meet the Indians. But the party fails to develop any kind of communication or gap between the East and the West because of the low mentality of the English, especially, the way Mrs. Callender behaves to the Bhattacharya women by the time they were introduced to the Indian women. She at once diverts Mrs. Moore's attention when they speak English. She looks down upon the Indian women. His party shows pathetic scene as Mrs. Moore says, "This party makes me angry and miserable. I think my country man must be mad, "Fancy inviting guests and treating them not properly" (36)

Mr. McBryde prosecutes the case against Aziz. The baseless fear, hatred, bigotry and imperialistic pride in McBryde's heart and mind operate at the court trial. He is not hesitant to say that the poor and wretched natives are "criminals at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude" (Forster 71). The facts nevertheless convince McBryde of Aziz's guilt. 'When an Indian goes bad, he goes not only very bad, but queer' (151). Hisentire case against Aziz is bound up with racial difference, objectification and Englishmen's emotions but not with evidence. His so called 'evidence' hinges on a intolerant ideology that privileges English as inherently superior to their imperial subjects who McBryde insists are no tlike 'us' (the British) because 'the psychology here is different'(151).McBryde relegates Indians to a subspecies, theorizing crime along racial lines (151).

Miss Adela Quested begins with an unbiased desire to know the real India. Later, she falsely accuses Aziz of attempting to rape her in the Marabar Caves. Her accusation opens a new chapter of doubts and suspicions. Suspicions, misunderstanding, racial hatred and vengeance come to the surface. Turbulence occurs in both the English and Indian circles. The English thinks it as an insult to the whole race (23). Adela is caught in double positioning... as inferior sex but superior race. Adela's accusation draws a line between the East and the West. At this phase of the novel, Forster shows how imperialism and colonialism ruin individual relations, eventually developing intomisrepresentation of the contact between the civilizations of different races . We may find that Adela shares the same colonialist, racist

attitude of her fiancé Ronny. When he says, "...India isn't a drawing room." "Your sentiments are those of a god," she said quietly, but it was his manner rather than his sentiments that annoyed her.... he said, "India likes gods. "And English like posing as gods" (62).

Cyril Fielding is an independent man who believes in cultivating the Indians to be individuals—a much more caring attitude toward the native inhabitants than that detained by most English in India. Fielding befriends Dr. Aziz, taking the doctor's side against the rest of the English in Chandrapore when Aziz is accused of attempting to rape Adela Quested. But with the course of time, Fielding does change and adopts the same way of thinking. After long time, When he became Government education inspector and came on a visit to Chandrapore, he objected that the school had been changed into a granary (61). Indeed he wanted to say that the Indians were not capable of keeping things as the Indians by nature were untidy and awkward. Similarly, he defended Ronny against his mother's rebuke at his bitterness towards the Indians by saying to her that he had no need to be pleasant. Since he belongs to the same bigoted ruling class, he exercises English's psyche to frustrate the Indians. His tactics and discourses similar to those adopted by colonial powers aimed at making the colonized races lose any hope of independence and freedom. He uses what Ngūgī calls "the cultural bomb" which creates "serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle" and makes the "possibilities of triumph or victory" appear "as remote, ridiculous dreams" (3). He tries to prove to Aziz that they are inferior to the British. "Away from us, Indians go to seed at once. Look at the King-Emperor High School! Look at your poems... Free our women and India will be free. Try it, my lad" (314). Fielding uses the imperative tone to remind Aziz that he is inferior to him. Further, Fielding the way he frustrates, Aziz that India is not Indian property. He claims that "it's nobody's India" (273). He aims to make him despair and see the chances of Independence as impossible. Furthermore, Fielding realizes how hard it is for India to be a nation because of its different religions and cults. Fielding is forced to behave in this manner because of his position in the imperial set up. It was



not the defect of the heart. Forster explains this idea very clearly when he says that "the sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me" (Forster 11). He stresses the fact that no native can escape his nativity and no white man can escape his white blood. Through the first half of the novel, Fielding and Aziz represent a positive model of liberal humanism. Forster suggests that the British rule in India could be successful and lasting if only the English and the Indians treated one another as Fielding and Aziz treat each other – as worthy individuals who connect with one another through frankness, intelligence, and good will. The friendship between Dr. Aziz and Fielding, however, is not a success. The social contact and harmony between Aziz and Fielding is ruined because of the suspicion and the racial distance which arise out of the imperialistic and colonial mind-set. Aziz has been hurt so much that he is not ready to trust anymore any English person. Forster juxtaposes him to the rest of the English as he was not like other officials with 'the undeveloped heart'. He is mature, intelligent and full of good will and consideration for other. However, he is a reserved and a solitary person and he is tainted with the psyche which was a great hurdle.

In *A Passage to India*, the English characters lacked human insight that Forster speaks about in his *Two Cheers for Democracy*, in their regards of Indians. Their minds are devoid of any need to "connect" and any time a native comes into contact with an English person, the latter sees it as a chance to humiliate the former. (32) Be it A Bridge Party or A Tea Party; be it at the hospital or the court; be it at social or political matter, the English have always tried to show themselves superior, different and aggressive and to make the locals inferior, less confident and more wretched. Mrs. Moore and Fielding tried to cross the barriers of suspicion, superiority complexes and insularity but the English were too stubborn to submit. Aziz turned to be the bitterest enemy of the English and wanted to blast every one of them. Forster, through the mouth of Aziz, declared that there could be no friendship between the Indians and the English as both stood diametrically opposed. The British were the masters of India and they looked upon themselves as

belonging to a superior race. In their eyes, the Indians belonged to an inferior race. Evidently, there could be only mastery and slavery between the superiors and the inferiors but no friendship. Kipling rightly said "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet". With this inherent atypical frame of mind and peculiar psyche, the English have failed in ruling the country with peace and tranquillity which resulted in chaos and disturbance. Friendship demanded equality which was absent in this case. In the last scene, Aziz realized this fact and told Fielding plainly that there could be no friendship between them as long as Fielding belong to the ruling class. Fielding asks to Aziz why they cannot be friends. Aziz replies to him in a very emotional way that hell to the English. He further adds that there can be no favour for the English regardless of their internal conflicts with Hindus. He tells him very clearly that until and unless the English are driven from India, there can be no friendship between them (317) and these were the reasons that the Indians disliked that they wanted to drive them off the country(18).

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