

The Link between Imperialism and Culture: A Passage to India as a Model

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Abstract: The present study aimed to examine the link between Imperialism and Culture in A Passage to India, to show that Forster meant to reinforce the colonialist ideology of superiority, along with the representation of India and Indians as stereotypes and marginalized people and culture in his novel. The study also wanted to examine the link between English man and culture and hybridism among the Indians and the development of the identity of the Indians. The study was based upon the analysis of the text of the novel in the light of Postcolonial theories. The study found that A Passage to India like any imperial discourse privileged the Europe and the European codes, and ideologies while the Indians and their culture were presented as lesser and inferior stereotypes and also based upon the exhaustive analysis of the novel in the light of postcolonial theory, has shown that the British officials in India invariably considered and treated Indians as stereotypes. The study has exposed their inherent biases and prejudices toward Indians. The study has also highlighted the impact of the colonist ideology and culture upon the indigenous culture and identity.

Keywords: Imperialism, Oppression, Culture and colonial ideology.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel A Passage to India, written by E.M. Forster in 1924, was chosen as one of the 100 great works ever written in English literature by the Modern Library, and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. In this novel, Forster seems to observe the English Empire from a critical point of view rather than a nostalgic one (Enos 1995: 88). The theme of the book is the non-superficial relationship of the Indians and the English. It is an attempt at understanding the country India and the Indians from a more personal, positive and meaningful perspective (Enos 1995: 105). However, it holds “out little hope either for social interaction between Europeans and Indians, or for Indian national independence” (Boehmer 1995: 101). The novel focuses on the three characters: Dr. Aziz, his British friend Cyril Fielding, and Adela Quested. During a trip to the Marabar Caves, Adela accuses Aziz of attempting to rape her. Aziz's trial brings out all the racial tensions and prejudices between Indians and the British colonialists who rule India. The Indian landscape is described as poor, trees are said to have a poor quality. The English people are presented as calm at the time of crisis, while the Indians are shown raving about impotently. British India is portrayed as an example of reason and orderliness, while the native India is irrational and superstitious. The conduct of an Indian nawab at the time of a minor accident to his car is meant to reveal the childish nature of the nawab. He loses his head, abuses his chauffeur, behaves badly towards Miss Derek, while the white men are presented as men of grace and poise. The narrator paints the Indians as indifferent to morals and individual responsibility. The bedroom of Aziz is squalid, the people there are busy in intrigues and gossip and their discontentment as shallow. The minds of the Indians are said to be inferior and rough. Dr. Aziz, an educated Indian, instead of cleaning his house, like Gandhi does in R.K. Narayan's novel (2000), is shown only grumbling. His house is a place of squalor and ugly talk. The floors are strewn with fragments of cane and nuts, spotted with ink, the pictures crooked upon the dirty walls without a punkah. His friends are described as third-rate people. Forster shows that educated Indians like Dr. Aziz would avoid politics at all costs. This is what the empire wanted. Forster also wanted to cultivate the politics of the empire. Fielding represents his point of view, “England holds India for her good”, an echo of the construction of Kipling, “White man's burden”. Haq, Aziz and others admit their inadequacy and inferiority at all levels.

This is meant to justify the presence of the British in India forever and forever. Everything associated with India is bad and ugly; April is a month of horrors. Indian sun, instead of having any beauty and glory, is sinister. Aziz, under the influence of colonial ideology, has assimilated the western notions of beauty as well and does not regard his late wife as beautiful. Compared to him, Sri Ram (Narayan, 2000) finds an Indian girl from the South more beautiful than the British Queen.

II. DISCUSSION

A Passage to India focuses on the problem of integrating the colonialists and the locals, as well as the racism shown by the colonialists towards the Indians. It shows misunderstandings and misinterpretations between the colonialists and locals, the division between East and West. Clashes occur when the racist English colonialists and the local Indians do not see eye to eye (Ashcroft 1995: 19). There are numerous misunderstandings, for example Mrs Bhattacharya's invitation; Aziz's collar 12 stud; the organisation of the bridge party; the choice of the woman Fielding marries; and, most importantly, what happens in the Marabar Caves (Childs 1999: 349). There are things that Englishmen fail to understand about Indian customs. An example of this is seen in the attitude Aziz has towards appointments he has made with the English. He proposes outings to his English acquaintances without actually intending to carry them out, something that these acquaintances cannot comprehend or accept. While Aziz is just talk, the English stick to their promises and make sure that these are carried out. Besides, punctuality is not the rule among the Indians; especially Aziz shows a nonchalant attitude. Yet at the same time, even when Callendar invites Aziz to his home, Callendar is not there to greet him: English colonialists have privileges. The visit to the Marabar caves is an attempt to show two British ladies the real India. However, a misunderstanding on this trip has tragic consequences due to cultural differences, which bring about uncontrollable anger between the British and Indians. The incident brings out all the racial tensions and prejudices between the Indians and the British colonialists who rule India: The English always stick together! That was the criticism. Nor was it unjust. Fielding shared it himself, and knew that if some misunderstanding occurred, and an attack was made on the girl by his allies, he would be obliged to die in her defence. He didn't want to die in her defence. He didn't want to die for her; he wanted to be rejoicing with Aziz. (Forster 1979: 235). By taking Aziz's side, Fielding steps over this line. This is because an Englishman should never take the side of an Indian, irrelevant of whether he is guilty or not. He is advised to stick with his own kind. In stepping out of line, he not only loses his own self, but he puts his fellow Englishmen at risk. Through the victory of the Indians after the trial, for the first time in the history of the English colony in the novel, the English are proved not to be always superior. The Indians finally get some power. Yet Nawab and Bahadur, the wiser of the Indians, realise that they would gain nothing by attacking the English. The English have fallen into their own pit, and are well aware of this. These two Indian men feel that it is better not to provoke the English colonists. The incident in the caves is the central moment in the novel. It is a muddle or a mystery that shows that India can only present confusion of morals, misunderstandings and misreading between the colonialists and the locals (Childs 1999: 349). The issue of what happens in the caves is not solved in the book, but left up to the imagination of the reader. In a letter to Forster in 1924, Dickinson suggested that maybe even Forster had no real solution or explanation as to what happened there. According to Dickinson, Forster deliberately chose not to convey any clear answer to his readers (Forster 1979: 26). The Marabar caves are depicted as mysterious. No matter how many of these caves the visitors have seen, they usually want to visit them again. They feel unsure as to whether or not such a visit is an interesting experience, are reluctant to talk about their visit, and usually try to put such experiences aside. They feel that the pattern of the caves repeats itself (Forster 1979: 138). Adela's recollection of what exactly happened in the caves seems to fade away. After a suggestion by Fielding, Adela begins to believe that the whole accusation could have been based on a hallucination; "the sort of thing", she concludes, "that makes some women think they've had an offer of marriage when none was made" (Forster 1979: 140). Later on, we see that Adela comes to the point where she seems to have completely lost interest in the incident and is no longer willing to discuss it further. The novel tells us that: "the question had lost interest for her suddenly" (Forster 1979: 242). Even though Fielding tries to convince everybody that it probably was the guide that tried to assault Adela, he is opposed by Hamidullah who retaliates "I gather you have not done with us yet, and it is now the turn of the poor old guide who conducted you round the caves" (Forster 1979: 243). One cannot fail to notice that all the opinions expressed in the novel regarding the incident do not seem to be given significance. This could be due to the indifference towards women that is portrayed throughout the novel. Even though both Mrs Moore and Adela are central characters, they are only important through their roles in patriarchal and imperialist structures as white English women, rather than through their personal relationships with other characters in the novel, irrelevant of whether those other

characters are male and female (Childs 1999: 357). Although, as stated earlier, the personal relationships of Adela are given no importance, she is still the one who gives Fielding the chance to meet Aziz. Even later on in their friendship, she provides the opportunity for their relationship to be put to the test. The accusation makes Aziz and Fielding draw closer to one another, and secures the friendship between two men, who are the two main male characters of the novel. Fielding chooses to side with his dear friend, Aziz, rather than with Adela, to the astonishment of the Anglo-Indian community (Childs 1999: 356). As a result of this, the bond between Fielding and Aziz becomes stronger. It is Adela's withdrawal of the accusation against Aziz that enables them to continue their friendship. The incident in the caves is thus only important up till this point when Adela withdraws her accusation. After this, it is no longer important what actually happened (Childs 1999: 357). According to Fielding, what happens in the caves could be one of these four things, Though, India is shown slowly and gradually moving towards its roots and identity, but it has not resulted in the development of national identity and resistance against colonialism. It is very difficult to agree with Cronin, that Aziz becomes "a nationalist hero", after his acquittal (1989). He never becomes one. He is nowhere seen challenging the British and asking them to quit India, in the spirit of a nationalist hero. Singh (1975) is right when he claims that Aziz is not a hero. However, his claim that Forster's knowledge of Anglo-India shows insight and penetration is an exaggeration. It is the repetition of the same old Orientalist construction. Forster has portrayed the Indians, even the educated ones as living in the past, immersed in pathos. The poetry of Aziz is full of references to Cordova and Samarkand. Aziz is portrayed as an escapist and not as a fighter. Instead of fighting against the Raj, against its oppression and injustice, he retires to a native state, which is described as "jungle state". Aziz displays only the 1st stage of colonial encounter (Fanon,2001). A period of unqualified assimilation. He does experience the 2nd stage of disturbance, but never moves on to the third phase, the fighting phase. Aziz is shown again reverting to a non-scientific and non-professional attitude. The distorted impact of imperial culture can be seen even in the temple. God is Love becomes God si Love. The Hindu music at the temple and religious festivals is complemented by British music and bands. Even in the midst of his meditation the image of Mrs. Moor appears in Godbole's mind and never leaves him. This is the portrayal of the impact of imperial culture and the resultant hybridity. India is throughout described as a land where everything is unpunctual. The divisions in the Hindu community are highlighted. Indian soil is a land of fissures (indirectly suggesting the relevance of the British as a force which can handle these fissures). The Indian freedom fighters and nationalists are portrayed as people who kick and scream on committees. Dr. Aziz is Forster's version of an Indian, who in reality lives in the past and retires to a native state and composes poems about bulbuls and roses. At the end he makes his peace with the English. Godbole, cannot even build the school he wants to build. Aziz is a memento, a trophy of the illegitimate embrace between India and the English. Aziz is so different from Sri Ram (Narayan,2001), who totally rejects imperial culture. The final message of the narrative is that so long as, there are people like Godbole and Aziz, Raj is not threatened and will continue to exert its influence even if Raj is formally withdrawn. Crane on the basis of the "progress" towards the relationship between the Indians and the British calls A Passage to India "an optimistic novel" (1992). This reveals the limitation of Crane. He associates himself with the British, a model for the neo-assimilative mode of hegemony.

III. CONCLUSION

The clash between the colonialists and the local Indians, at the beginning of the novel, appears to be a racial one. The novel also addresses the issues of colonialism, rape and nationalism. There is a distinction between the political passions of the British in India, and their social issues. The political passions are only brought up every now and again in the novel. We read of these again at the end of the novel during the incident of the English at Mau. However, this incident only emphasizes the real theme of the novel, the friendship between the Englishman, Fielding and the Indian, Dr Aziz. The setting on their ride symbolizes the differences significant between the two men. The main difference is the difference of race. Friendship between colonizer and colonized cannot work. India is presented as soft, seductive, and feminine, feminizing its men. However, there are also masculine men in India, and they fulfill important functions in the narrative. The study has shown that E. M. Forster's novel, A Passage to India, reinforces the colonialist ideology of superiority and its narrative strengthens the stereotypes, and the East –West division, invented by the West about India and the Indians. The study has proved its basic proposition that A Passage to India is a colonialist discourse and as one form of Orientalism has strengthened and reinforced the stereotype image of India and Indians. The study has shown that Forster has not made even a passing reference to the oppression and the pandemic brutalities of the natives by the colonizers. He has not mentioned any Indian leader or the struggle put up by the Indians to get rid of their oppressors. The study has also shown the deep link between culture and imperialism. The Indians are shown to have assimilated the culture of their

master's. The Indians are portrayed as ashamed of themselves, of their culture and of their identity. Throughout the novel, the Indians are presented as lesser people, who cannot manage their affairs like mature, responsible individuals. This is the projection of the European hegemonic assumptions, which have been exposed by the present study. The analysis also has highlighted the portrayal of the internal divisions and infighting among the Indians, on social and religious grounds. This was meant to justify the presence of the British in India.

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