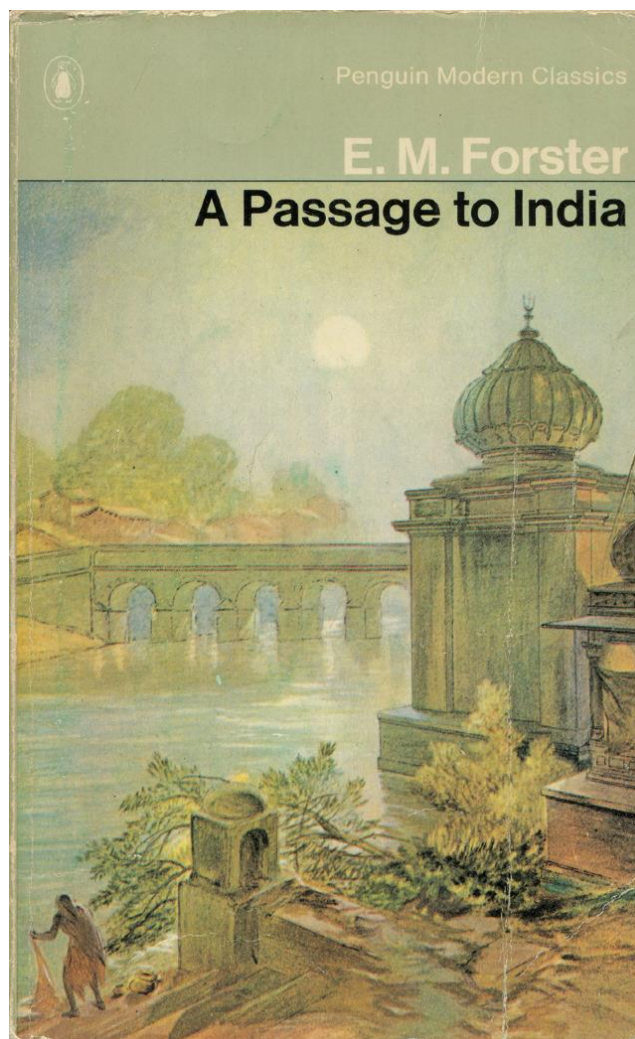


A Post-Colonial View of *A Passage to India*

Dr. Arun Behera, Ph.D., PGDTE, DDE, PGDJ, AMSPI, M.A.
Vijay Bhaskar, II year B.Sc. (Hons.)



Abstract

In this article we would like to highlight some of the relationships that existed between the colonizer and the colonized in a colonial context and the relationship that may exist between two friends as manifested in Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. F. R. Leavis calls Forster "pre-

eminently a novelist of civilized personal relation" (Leavis, 1968:102). In all his five books, Forster has focused on the aspects of human relationships.

Key Words: Post-colonial, *A Passage to India*, English, Symbol, Character, Independence

Introduction

"I've often thought about it, Helen. It's one of the most interesting things in the world. The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched--a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme there. There love means marriage settlements, death, death duties. So far I'm clear. But here is my difficulty. This outer life though obviously horrid, often seems the real one---there's grit in it. It does breed character; do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end?" (Forster, 1990:134)

Depiction of the Psychological Barrier

The above quote shows Forster's concern for human conduct. He also displays a particular interest in the superficial, materialistic life that he believes to be delusionary. His perception of human relationships was different from that of mutual benefits. From a post colonial perspective, after nearly six decades, independent India reveals how meticulous Forster was in depicting the psychological barrier that existed between the British and the Indians during the days of British Raj.

Barriers of Racial Difference

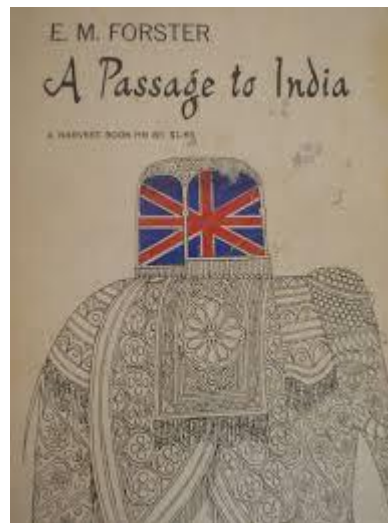
To Jan Mohamed, *A Passage to India* attempts "to overcome the barriers of racial difference" (Childs, 1999:348). Nirad Chaudhuri, on the other hand, criticised it "for its reduction of political history to a liberal's preoccupation with personal relationships" (Childs, 1999:347). To Nihal Singh, however, the novel depicts "how the British in India despise and ostracise Indians, while on their part the Indians mistrust and misjudge the British" (Childs, 1999:347). The racial barrier between the West and the East is well depicted in the book. Its characters are equally stereotyped and its incidents are merely stereotypical.

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The Colonial Aspect



Forster's works are somehow always an analysis of the English abroad such as *A Room with a View*, and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. In *A Room with a View*, Lucy despairs of an Italy, disguised by a recreation of English norms. Here, in *A Passage to India* it is just confined to India and the character who symbolizes the suffering is Dr. Aziz. He happens to be the mime, who tries to be more British, hoping to make a human contact with them. But both the characters, Aziz and Fielding, fail to make that human contact and bridge the gaps.

The Inevitable Dichotomy

The entire postcolonial literature exhibits mixed feelings towards the inevitable dichotomy that has been brought out in this novel. Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, ambivalence and in-betweenness lay emphasis on the aspect of the colonial other. Whether it is in the works of Bhabha or any other post-colonial theorist, the concept of the 'colonial other' or the inbetweenness between 'colonial other' and the mimed British image are recurrent themes.

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. (Bhabha, 2001: 381)

The British Mind as Depicted

Not only the duo but all the characters fail on their parts to bridge the gulf of the Other and make human contact. Forster did see an opportunity of this human contact being made, but

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he criticizes the British for not having availed it, in his book. He criticizes the British of the “narrow mindedness” that they display throughout the novel. The ‘Bridge party’ stands as a witness to this. Later Forster conveys the ignorance of the British through the subaltern. During the hysterical meeting after the arrest of Aziz, the subaltern shares his ideas:

The native’s all right if you let him alone. Lesley! Lesley! You remember the one I had a knock with on your maidan last month. Well, he was all right. Any native who plays polo is all right. What you’ve got to stamp on is these educated classes, and, mind, I do know what I’m talking about this time. (Forster, 2005:173)

The Prejudice

The irony is that the polo player here is Dr. Aziz himself. In this way Forster brings forth the prejudice held by the British towards the subaltern, but he fails to challenge the basis of the prejudice. If Forster wanted to differentiate between the known Colonial India and the ‘Real India’ that is unknown he shouldn’t have generalized. In the novel the positive traits are attributed to an individual. But when it comes to negative traits, it is seen to be attributed to a generalized group of Indians. There is subtle dehumanizing effect in the novel that re-emphasizes the aspect of the ‘Master and slave’. Aziz, Forster’s hero in the book turns into a ‘sympathetic’ character in the later half, as he becomes a poet lost in his own world after the he had taken.

Prof. Godbole comes as another misfit to this social pantomime which *A Passage to India* is. We see the strange atmosphere that is set in when this character, whose existence is worth questioning, comes to interact with the rest:

‘I hope the expedition was a successful one.’

‘The news has not reached you yet, I can see.’

‘Oh yes.’

‘No; there has been a terrible catastrophe about Aziz.’

‘Oh yes. That is all around the college.’

‘Well, the expedition where that occurs can scarcely be called a successful one,’
said Fielding, with an amazed stare.

‘I cannot say, I was not present.’ (Forster, 2005: 164-165)

Conclusion

To conclude, it is hard to decide whether the friendship between the colonizer and the colonized would ever be possible. Forster leaves this as an ambiguity, leaving it for the reader to decide. But he hints towards a possible friendship post-independence when he says that Aziz is ready to re-establish his relation with Fielding after Independence has been achieved. This symbolizes the friendship perceived by him, which India and Britain would have once India was free. There have been many articles on this aspect of *A Passage to India* but, there remain broader aspects of this novel that are yet to be explored, hoping that one such explorer finds the answer in his quest of reality through this article.

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Dr. Arun Behera, Ph.D., PGDTE, DDE, PGDJ, AMSPI, M.A'

Dept of English

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning

Brindavan Campus

Kadugodi Post

Bangalore-560067

Karnataka

India

drbehera65@gmail.com

Vijay Bhaskar, II year B.Sc. (Hons.)

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning

Brindavan Campus

Kadugodi Post

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