

**Paradoxical Relationship between East and West:
A Study of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India***

Tahir Mahmood



E. M. Forster (1879-1970)

Courtesy: <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/edward-morgan-forster-1275.php>

Abstract

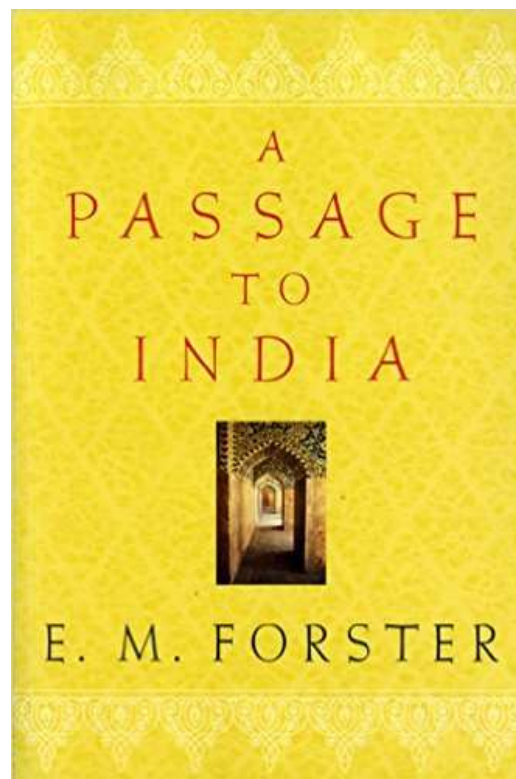
The focus of this study is on the relevance and differences between British colonizers and Indian colonized. E.M. Forster in his master piece *A Passage to India* has well portrayed the culture of British in India and native Indians and their relationship with each other. Most of the British thought that they were superior to native Indians and most of the Indians thought that British were not worth friendship. Forster has portrayed both good and bad natured human beings from both the communities in the novel and his focus was on how British should give freedom to Indian people and territory, so that both the communities would live in peace. But the researcher comes to the conclusion that if so called superior British would have given equal status and love to the native Indians, it was possible that both the communities might have lived together happily like a family.

Keywords: E. M. Forster, *Passage to India*, British, Indians, Natives, Relationship, Misapprehension, Duality, Human Soul.

Introduction

East is one of the four cardinal directions of the compass. It is in the opposite direction of West. East can also be related with the Orient, which broadly refers to various cultures, social structures and philosophical systems eminent in the East. In this research paper the term ‘east’ refers to the colonised people and their countries like India, Columbia, America, etc. West, also known as Occident, is in the opposite direction of East. Thus, we can say opposite means in contrast with east and in this research work ‘west’ refers to colonizers like Spaniards and British. It was a general and narrow notion that occident was superior to oriental. Holding this narrow notion in view, occident became imperious to orient in every aspect of life. People in Occident thought their language, literature, or culture were more civilized than the people of East, which gave birth to an infamous concept of ‘White Men’s burden’.

To Nihal Singh, 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). Actually, the whole concept of colonisation is based on this illogical notion that the colonized people were useless and worthless; they were a burden on the shoulders of colonizers. They thought it was their responsibility and duty to teach these unprivileged, primitive, uncivilised and savage people of east.



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White Man's Burden

The concept of 'White Man's Burden' came into existence after the publication of Rudyard Kipling's poem *The White Man's Burden: The United States and Philippine Islands*. According to Rudyard Kipling,

Take up the white man's burden-
Send forth the best ye breed-
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild-
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half - devil and half - child. (McClure's Magazine, vol. XII, No.4)

But inferentially we come to know that the whole process of pretending as godfather of the colonised was the greed and selfishness of colonizers. They actually wanted the resources of the colonized, and so they pretended as the saviours and guardians. The concept of their greed, selfishness and duality of their soul is well portrayed by E.M. Forster in his famous novel *A Passage to India*. The purpose of this research paper is to present the concept of Forster about the relationship between authoritative west and destitute east. It also desires to shed some light on the drawbacks of colonisation.

Review of Literature

Mohammad Ayub Jajja in his study *A Passage to India: The Colonial Discourse and the Representation of India and Indians as Stereotypes* examines the link between imperialism and culture and the resultant mimicry and hybridist among the Indians and the development of the identity of the Indians. It is based on the Postcolonial analysis of the text of the novel *A Passage to India*. The study proved 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. It has also shown that Forster did not make even a passing reference to the oppression and the pandemic brutalities of the natives by the colonizers. He did not mention any Indian leader or the struggle put up by the Indians to get rid of their oppressors but showed a deep link between culture and imperialism. In this study, Indians are portrayed as ashamed of themselves, of their culture and of their identity. They are presented as inferior people, who cannot manage their affairs like mature and responsible individuals. The projection of the European hegemonic assumptions has been exposed by the present study. It has also highlighted the portrayal of the internal divisions and infighting among the Indians, on social and religious grounds.

Muhammed Elham Hossain in his study *The Colonial Encounter in A Passage to India* throws light on the cases that are responsible for the conflicting position of East and West. According to him, a close and thorough reading of *A Passage to India* reveals Forster's political awareness and liberal cleverness in respect of racial tension and human problems. Attempts may be made for the fusion of two races, i.e., east and west; human emotions may come to the climax on both sides, but their fusion is not possible in the master-slave environment. Rather Forster has

prophetically voiced that the colonizers must wind up their Indian empire and it may only then be possible to bridge East and West.

Zoe Lehmann in her study *The Colonial Other in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India* applies post-colonial concepts of 'otherness' to *A Passage to India*. The study attempts to provide an insight into the complex web of human relationships described in this novel. Despite the veneer of civilised interaction, the characters, and perhaps Forster himself, are unable to reconcile the uneasy construct of coloniser subject with personal human contact. To Forster, the Colonial Other is a barrier to meaningful relationships, and in *A Passage to India* he shows a pessimism in which attempts to bridge the cultural gulf only serves to reinforce it.

Oana Andreea Pirnuta in his study *Indian vs. British Cultural Aspects in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India* studies the dichotomy between the Indian and British cultural aspects in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* focusing on the relationship established between the British colonies and the Indians. He also highlighted the contrast between the Indian and the European way of thinking. Forster's message changes throughout the course of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, characters such as Fielding and Aziz are evidence of Forster's belief that with goodwill, intelligence and respect, all individuals can connect. But, in the final scenes, the natural landscape of India itself seems to rise up and divide Aziz and Fielding from each other. Forster suggests that though men may be well-intentioned, outside circumstances such as cultural difference and the interference of others can conspire to prevent their union.

Methodology

The study is a case study, but it is a comparative study of two cultures (cases) of so-called superior English race and the inferior Indian people. The stories display the desolate life of colonised Indians portrayed by the novelist in his novel *The Passage to India*. The study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative approach was carried out through the study of novel as primary source and other reference books, research papers, thesis, etc. as secondary sources. The methodology also includes:

- I. Collection and thorough reading of primary source.
- II. Thorough study of critical or secondary works.
- III. Study of reference material available on the topic.
- IV. Interaction with eminent teachers and scholars on the topic.
- V. Documentation, citations and references according to MLA style sheet 7th edition was adhered to.
- VI.

Objectives of the Research

In this research work, the researcher wants to explore East-West relationship in the context of British rule in India. The objectives of this research paper include the following:

1. To explore the relationship between east-west during British rule.
2. To present the image of natives in the eyes of the British.
3. To present the real image of Colonizers.
4. To explore the dual nature of some characters.
5. To manifest neutrality in some characters.

Discussion

Misapprehension among Indians and British

Misapprehension means failure to understand something or an understanding or belief about something that is not correct. There are many evidences of misapprehension or misunderstanding between colonizers and colonized in E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. People of both communities didn't have faith in each other. There were some inborn misconceptions in the minds of both the communities and in some minds cunning and selfishness. Adela Quested came from England to explore India, as she said, "I want to see the real India." (*A Passage to India* Page no 25) She is a great human being, but she possessed a misconception about native Indians particularly about Indian Muslims that they were having loose character and possessed many wives. Once Mrs Turton told her that Mohammadans always kept four wives. While climbing the rocks to Malabar caves, she asks Dr Aziz "Have you one wife or more than one?" (*A Passage to India*, page no 151) He was in trouble, how would he remove her confusion and replied, "One, one in my own particular case" (page no151). He thinks about the misconception an English person, Adela Quested is having about Indian Muslims. He perceives it as if all English people are having delusion about native people; they think as if the natives are neither good human beings nor trustworthy. They are equivalent to beasts. This was his apprehension but all of a sudden Adela Quested blamed him for the attempt of sexual assault. This gave strength to his apprehension and it became his belief that English people are having cunning sensitivity towards natives. In the court when the English fraternity came in support of Adela Quested, his belief became stronger and now his perception about these colonisers is totally different. According to him, these people are neither trustworthy nor good human beings for becoming friends. He even counted his best friend Cyril Fielding in the same cunning category. Actually, Fielding was a good human being and trustworthy like Dr Aziz. It was misconception drawn by some cunning colonizers in the mind of innocent Adela Quested, which came out in the form of hallucination and blamed Dr Aziz and in return Dr Aziz could neither bear her blame nor could understand the situation. His power of thinking failed to discriminate between cunning English people from good hearted English human beings. Thus, he made a notion that all English people are cheaters and none of them are worthy of any friendship. In this way as per the interpretation of the researcher it is not natural instinct of the people of East or West that the other is inferior or non-trust-worthy, but it is the job of some cunning, selfish people who have created the adverse image of one community in the minds of other people for their individual interests.

Duality of Human Soul

There is never anything that is certain when you talk about human nature. No one is alike, no one acts the same, no one wants the same, and no one has the same nature. Unlike the other Englishmen, Fielding does not recognize the racial distinctions between himself and the native Indians. Instead, he interacts with the Indians on one-to-one basis. Fielding treats the Indians as a group of individuals who can connect through mutual respect, courtesy and intelligence. Cyril Fielding seems to be the model of successful interaction between the English and the Indians. *A Passage to India* begins and ends by 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.

Forster uses this question as a framework to explore the general issues of Britain's political control of India on a more personal level, through the friendship between Aziz and Fielding.

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 the British rule in India could be successful and respectful if only English and Indians treated each other as Fielding and Aziz treat each other. But at the end when Adela Quested blamed Dr Aziz and his misconception about Fielding that he married Adela Quested formed a deep and never-ending hatred in Dr Aziz for all English population in general and his friend Fielding in particular. Thus, the researcher formed a view that it is duality of human soul in Dr Aziz also that he could not understand his close friend's good intention but thought that he is not worth friendship for the only reason that English people are not trustworthy.

Ronny Heaslop

Ronny Heaslop's character is created by the colonizers. There are two facets of his personality. In England he is a learned man with proficient intellect, but when he reaches in India, leaves all behind and talks in colonizer's lingo. Both Mrs Moore and Adela get surprised when they first time meet him in India. They notice the difference between the Ronny they knew in England and the Ronny of British India. The open-minded attitude with which he has been brought up has been replaced by a suspicion of Indians. Now he has become an arch-type of British rule in India, accepts his role as a colonizer and enjoys the privileges that accompany it. He would fight anyone who tried to take these privileges away from him. He inquires, "What do you [Mrs Moore] and Adela want me to do? Go against my class, against all the people I respect and admire out here? Lose such power as I have for doing well in this country, because my behaviour isn't pleasant?" (A Passage to India Page no 49) He has left nothing but only a puppet in the hands of colonizers whose string is pulled by them and move him accordingly. Ronny's tastes, opinions and even his manner of speaking are no longer his own, but those of the seniors, ostensibly wise British Indian officials. If he refuses his role and shows sympathy to the colonised, other colonizers will reject him. If he accepts it, he will enjoy its privileges and will be accepted in the colony. Somewhere this illegitimacy of British presence in India is realised by him. Yet, to maintain his status and retain his privilege as a respected member of the colony he convinces himself and others of the legitimacy of the British rule in India. After studying Ronny's character, the researcher draws the conclusion that he [Ronny] possesses a twofold nature. Somewhere his conscience opposes his actions and the element of duality presents in his character. On the one hand he knows about his wrong doings, on the other he has to do it...

Neutralism

British rule could not efface the liberal opinion of people of both the races. [English and Indian] In the novel, E.M. Forster mirrors us this reality through the characters of professor Godbole and Mrs. Moore. The duo is disinterested with the happenings of the day and do not support their respective communities. They seem to take part in a sort of metaphysical realm where worldly concerns such as personal relationships, order and muddle in the social world simply do not matter. The duo has a lot in common, both are unpractical and unworldly in their attitude to

life; both are equally religious and have mystical yearnings for a divine order transcending the divisions of earth. Godbole is Forster's mouthpiece for the idea of the unity of all living things. He alone remains aloof from the drama of the plot, refraining from taking sides by recognizing that all are implicated in the evil of Marabar. When Fielding asks him, "Is Aziz innocent or guilty?" He replies, "That is for the court to decide. The verdict will be in strict accordance with the evidence, I make no doubt. Dr Aziz is a most worthy young man, I have a great regard for him; but I think you are asking me whether the individual can commit good actions or evil actions, and that is rather difficult for me" (*A Passage to India* Page No 174) He is neutralise here and does not support either of the party. On the other hand, Mrs Moore, also shows openness in terms of religion and politics. She is a Christian, but her experience of India has made her dissatisfied with what she perceives as the smallness of Christianity. She does not have the rigid mentality of the Anglo-Indians and not depends on reason and logic to understand life. She always believes in unity and oneness, says, "The English are out here to be pleasant. Because India is a part of the earth and God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God.....is.....love" (*A Passage to India* page no 51)

Conclusion

Coming closer towards the end of this research work, the researcher came to the conclusion that both the populations (British and Indians) studied in this research work are divided by E. M. Forster into two categories. Both the populations contain good human beings and cunning, selfish beasts. Good humans from both the populations encounter both good and bad human beings throughout the novel, but it is the influence of super-ego, how they will take the bad experience with other population. Some people like Cyril Fielding and Mrs Moore could understand the situation and misconception but sometimes educated and kind hearted human being like Fielding is unable to understand the situation. This is the main cause of misunderstanding and hatred between the two communities. Another reason for the hatred is that most of the British people think that they are superior to natives and the natives in return feel that proudly British are their enemies. Actually, if both the communities will give due respect and love to each other, then there was a great possibility that both Indians and British may have lived together like a family.

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