

A STUDY ON THE MINGLING OF THE EAST AND THE WEST IN E.M. FORSTER'S A PASSAGE TO INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The theme of the mingling of the East and the West has been dealt by many literary artists.

E. M. Forster took the title of the novel from American author Walt Whitman's poem "Passage to India," published in 1871. The word *passage* refers to the Suez Canal, the 121-mile-waterway that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. When the canal opened on November 17, 1869, ships from England and other European countries could reach the Orient without sailing around Africa. Whitman's poem celebrates the canal as a great engineering achievement. More important, though, it hails the canal as a means to improve communication between East and West and thereby foster cultural, spiritual, and social interaction benefiting everyone. Whitman's poem also hails the 1866 completion of the transatlantic cable between North America and Europe and the 1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad between the eastern and western United States.

..... The general theme of the novel is that in spite of engineering achievements, such as the canal, the world has a long way to go before people of different cultures, religions, and social systems can live side by side peacefully as coequals. Only sincere goodwill can bring them together as brothers, as Forster points out through his character Cyril Fielding, an Englishman who sympathizes with Indians. This paper focuses on a study of the mingling of the Indians and the Europeans, the mingling of the East and the West as expressed by E. M. Forster in his famous novel, A Passage To India.

Key words: Mingling, Indians, Europeans, races, relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the British colonies in various parts of the world has resulted in the extension of political power, economic control over larger areas, increase in material wealth and it also gave birth to many literary contributions. Many contributions were brought into the literary field due to the colonial expansion as it resulted in the mingling of different races from different countries. The study of the mingling of the two different cultures is interesting. To enter into a created work of art could be similar to the experience that one has when one encounters a totally new culture. Sometimes the encounter could give the readers what sociologists call cultural shock and one experiences a sense of alienation. Human experience is full of activities in which one has to make new adjustments, new situations, sometimes as a simple, sometimes at a highly complex level.

In the complex fabric of contemporary Indian civilisation, the two most easily discerned strands are the indigenous Indian traditions and imported European conceptions. Almost every educated Indian today is the product of the conflicts and reconciliations of two cultures, although the consciousness of this tension varies from individual to individual. A number of novelists have attempted to study this encounter at various depths of meaning. Even most of the celebrated Indian – English novelists like R.K. Narayan; Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya and others have explored the varied aspects of East-West theme in their creative writings.

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is concerned with the fundamental problems of personal, racial, communal and caste relations of friendship, love, mutual faith and personal loyalties among individuals and of man's relation to nature and above all, to the unconscious and irrational in man. This novel is a symbolic expression of Forster's humanism.

THE MINGLING OF THE THREE CULTURES

The characteristic combinations of E. M. Forster's art are most complex in *A Passage To India* which compares three cultures – West European – Christian, Indian – Muslim and Indian-Hindu. The novel has been divided into three parts- Mosque, Caves and Temple.

Part I 'Mosque' is about the attempt to bridge the gap between India and England through the friendship of Aziz with Fielding and Mrs. Moore.

Part II 'Caves' is about the breakdown of the hope of friendship. All relations of Part I dissolve. Mrs. Moore, who after her experience in the cave, loses interest in people and moral issues, makes no move to help Aziz, but starts back to England, dying on the way. Adela and Ronny break up. She returns to England. Aziz, after the case has been dismissed, becomes suspicious of Fielding's motives in dissuading him from seeing Adela; he suspects Fielding of intending to marry her. Fielding returns to England.

Part III 'Temple' attempts a new synthesis It takes place in a Hindu principality, where Godbole is now Minister of Education and Aziz out of disgust with British India, has taken a post as court physician. The festival celebrating the birth of Krishna reminds, the readers, of Christmas, showing the University of Myth. But the references are even more important. The festival is curiously officious for it is there, in an atmosphere thick with religion and rain that Aziz and Fielding are reconciled and Aziz's bond with Mrs. Moore renewed through her children, Ralph and Stella. Aziz learns that Fielding has married Stella and not Adela. In the same way, Mrs. Moore becomes a potent force in the novel after she breaks in the experience of the cave to a mentality like Godbole's to the mythical mentality. Mrs. Moore refuses to take a stand based on the distinction between good and evil. She does not assail people from outside but – takes them over from inside. She becomes part of the echo that haunts Adela's mind, causing her finally to withdraw charges against Aziz; she becomes a goddess to the Hindu mob, who imagine she was killed because she wanted to save India, she retains her hold on Aziz's affection, though she has done less than Fielding and Adela to save him, because of Mrs. Moore, Fielding gets married and Aziz's reconciliation with Fielding begins with his sympathy for Ralph Moore, who is like his mother, oriental in spirit. But one do not, as in Part I, make the mistake of supposing that success in one sphere could change matters in another. Although at the end Fielding and Aziz are on horse back, riding together, one could see that they have moved apart politically. Fielding then finds things to be said for British imperialism, while Aziz is fanatically anti-British.

In the beginning of the book, Aziz encounters with Mrs. Moore in the half darkness of the mosque. She respects him, she sympathizes with his wrongs and she says that she doesn't think that she understands people very well. She adds that she only knew whether she likes or dislikes them. Aziz tells her that already she had slipped away from Anglo-India, even from her

companion, Adela Quested, who wants to see the real India and not Indians. Ronny Heaslop proclaims the creed of British rule in India. He is under the opinion that the English are not in India to be pleasant, but to do justice and keep peace.

THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

The fundamental problem between the Indians and the ruling white man, as E.M. Forster saw it, was one of human relationship, which had been perverted by the imperial myth and its code. The problem is in a discussion at Hamidullah's house. The pucca-sahib code made friendly relations between the Indians and the English impossible and had evil effects on both. Fielding's relation to the pucca-sahib code is dynamic and Aziz's apprehension at the beginning of the book is duly confirmed by the gestures of Fielding towards the end of the novel. Hamidullah, in the later part of the novel, raises the question of ethics in politics. He asks whether England is justified in holding India and whether it is moral on the part of an Englishman to occupy a job in India for which qualified Indians are available. At this point Fielding's consciousness shows a streak of Rudyard Kipling's myth of the Whiteman's burden but he brushes it aside and gives a reasonable answer to Hamidullah.

Fielding honestly admits that he is in order to enjoy himself and be happy. Instead of giving the stereo-typed imperial answer that England holds India for good, he gives an honest answer. In the context of the whole, an honest acceptance of the fact would be the minimum possible basis for building up a true relationship between the Indians and the English. The myth of the whiteman's burden, however, consists of a string of lies and perverts the Anglo-Indian attitude.

Towards the end of the book when Fielding gets married, he throws in his lot with the Anglo-Indians and begins to repeat the imperial cliches. He could not then meet Aziz on a natural human basis and is surprised at his own heroism in the past. The novel ends with Aziz prophesying doom to the British Empire based on a string of lies and run by a perverted code of behaviour.

Forster is among the few prominent Englishmen of letters who have written about India. In spite of having Indian friends and having lived there for some time, he confesses his inability to understand the country and of its people, he finds them fascinating but also exasperating.

Forster's description of his visit to India in 1945 is neither culture nor deep and has tried to understand the personal relations between the British rulers and their Indian subjects. He does not minimize the difficulties in improving their relations. Forster may be described as one who has tried but failed to understand India and Indians fully.

What makes A Passage To India so profoundly satisfying a novel to which one frequently returns is its perfect combination of symbolic suggestion, psychological insight and social realism. Few twentieth century novelists have succeeded so well infusing these elements.

Forster has worked along fairly traditional lines. He has acknowledged his debt to Jane Austen, from whom he learnt a skilful combination of comedy and seriousness, mastery of dialogue. The French novelist Proust showed him how to look at character in the modern subconscious way. On the whole his success arises less from innovation and experiment than from bringing to perfection an existing form. It follows therefore that the meaning of A Passage To India does not reside in its symbolism alone, powerful and resonant as that may be, nor in its insight into character, deep and subtle as that is, nor in its presentation of social issues, but in the vision that embraces all three, the beauty of its design controls and contains its saddest and most disturbing implications. The dialectical structure, which consists of positive affirmation (Mosque), negative retraction (Caves), muted re-affirmation (Temple), is reflected in every detail of novel's imaginative organization.

The human issues are of permanent interest. Forster explores two main types of human relations: those between man and women and those between man and man although he is more successful with the latter. The breakdown in each illustrates how difficult it is for one person to communicate with another. The reasons for this are complex. In the case of Adela, Ronny and Fielding the main cause seems to be a lack of imaginative sympathy; all in some degree suffer from the Englishman's chief weakness – an undeveloped heart, but neither Mrs. Moore nor Aziz share this fault, nor indeed does the simple-minded Ralph Moore. Aziz and Mrs. Moore trust their emotional responses without rationalizing them; it is this that brings them of heart overhead that brings about Aziz's troubles; he is more headstrong than Fielding. If no single character succeeds in connecting reason and emotion in an enduring balance, Mrs. Moore, Aziz, Professor Godbole and Fielding come nearest to achieving the ideal. The ideal of the good is

much more widely distributed in this novel than *Howards End* where it is unconvincingly focused on the character, Margaret Schlegel. Each of the characters in *A Passage to India* fails in a different way and for different reasons.

The final effect is not one of the pessimism but of qualified optimism, since one witness a variety of approaches to truth, each having something in common with the other, each having a relative validity, none being complete. The reader is invited to make an imaginative synthesis.

The moral and imaginative effect of the novel is to make the readers more sensitive to the importance of love and imagination in human affairs, to make the readers being skeptic of putting their trust in any one religion or creed, and to believe in the unique power of beauty and personal relations.

CONCLUSION

Forster describes himself as belonging to the fag end of Victorian Liberalism. Intellectual curiosity, free speech, absence of race prejudice, respect for individuality and faith in parliamentary democracy are still cherished by Forster. It is with this background that he surveys the transformed political and intellectual climate of the present days.. He is a Liberal clinging to his faith in a world becoming totalitarian.

In his novels and essays, Forster stresses the immense importance of personal relations, of giving and receiving affection. He considers this a moral and artistic pursuit of the highest value. *A Passage To India* is a plea for affectionate personal relations between the British and the Indians in the place of prejudice, contempt and hatred.

On the whole, the impression that he makes is of a writer with free mind, stubbornly clinging to his ideals and presenting his ideas and characters with charm and good taste.

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