



Cultural Aspects in E.M. Foster's '*A Passage to India*'

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Abstract

E.M, Forster's *A Passage to India* deals with racism, class conflict and distinct prejudice. It is concerned with colonialism. This paper aims to explore one basic issue, the cultural misunderstanding between the colonizer and the colonized. Forster's study of India's history, politics, geography and culture and above all his observation of India culminate in *A Passage to India*. It may sufficiently lend weight to the view that this novel is mostly influenced by the experience of Forster's first visit to India. Forster's message has changed throughout the novel course of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, belief that with goodwill, intelligence and respect, all individuals can connect is shown. 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.

Introduction:

E. M. Forster (1879-1970) was an English novelist, short story writer and essayist. Forster had produced five novels. His novels are *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest journey* (1907), *A Room with a view* (1908), *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* in 1924. He deals with class differences, sexuality, humanism, social conventions, codes of conduct, racial tensions and prejudices between British and Indians through his novels.

Novel, *A Passage to India* opens with town Chandrapore in which story takes place. Nature and other resources of India are sketched by novelist. He attacks on British rulers who do not understand the nature of country side and its importance. Dr. Aziz, joins the discussion about friendship with Englishman. After discussion he goes to surgeon where he coldly snubbed by two English woman. He enters mosque for peace. The mosque, with its quite beauty represents oneness in India. He meets Mrs. Moore who has come for peace. Aziz is an Indian young man who reacts fast. Mrs. Moore is a kind old woman who wants to see India and interact with Indians. After discussion Mrs. thinks to see India with the help of



Aziz. She has come from English club. Between Aziz and Mrs. Moore a bond of friendship and attachment get developed. Adela, young lady has come to India to see India and Adela is going to marry Ronny Heaslop, son of Mrs. Moore. This desire for natural friendship with Indians is not shared by The English Chandropore. They think it is a mistake to see more of Indians than is strictly necessary. The women are very ignorant and crude. They always insist on their racial superiority over the natives.

When Mrs. Moore expresses a desire to meet Indians, her wish was taken with amusement and dislike. They do not like when Mrs. Moore crosses official line separating the English from Indians. When Mrs. Moore talks to her son then she realizes the real life of British in India. Aziz appreciates Mrs. Moore's treatment to Indians. She is quite sympathetic with Indians. A Bridge party was organized by British in order to help Mrs., Moore and Adela to see India. The Bridge party means as a bridge between two people. Party proves failure. There can be no communication between British and Indians. British shows themselves as self content group keeping their distance from the Indians. In spite of their invitation, they do not want to share and enjoy with Indians. They want to deal with Indian on official level. Social attachment with Indians is beyond imagination for them. The women make an effort at all to understand Indian customs and conventions. Indians, who seek goodwill of British, are also often humiliated.

Mrs. Moore and Adela on the one hand and Fielding on other hand make genuine effort to meet and talk to Indians. Mrs. Moore talks to her son, Ronny expressing her disgust at the way English behaved in party. Ronny tries to give clarification to Mrs. Moore but in vain. Mrs. Moore detects the gap between the Indian and Ronny. Mrs. Moore feels that even when his views are logical. Aziz is insulted by the English Civil Surgeon. After failure of Bridge party there is success of tea party given by Fielding. There is no racial discrimination. Fielding is very informal towards Aziz who is naturally impulsive and responds enthusiastically to Fielding's goodwill. Aziz's impulsiveness and Fielding's friendliness dissolves the racial barrier between the English and the Indians. E. M. Forster, rightly points out, "The friendship between Aziz and Fielding is the relationship that forms the emotional centre of the book. For both men, friendship is a consumption devoutly to be wished, for each feels acutely the loneliness endemic to the human condition. They long for the secret understanding of the heart that might soothe their discontents." (196)



Another thing to be noted is of strange figure of Prof. Godbole, who is contrast to Aziz in nature. Godbole has a personality that is very mysterious and complex one. Aziz tries to draw the secret of Marbar caves from Hindu Brahmin. Godbole refuses to disclose to English visitors and talks vaguely. Adela and Fielding feel Indian life a muddle. Godbole has sensibility which goes one step further. Godbole sings song of lord Krishna. In which he God is appealed to come but refuses to. The song proves that Godbole is content to be in a state in which God is never likely to come. Mrs. Moore and Godbole have power to admit the existence of mysteries in world.

Ronny and Adela, sensible British lovers try to solve the problem facing their love. But later on they understand the gap and reality. Adela wants to see real India around her but her future husband is far away from nature and beauty around him. Adela decides Ronny is not suitable for her. Adela decides to go back to England. She deliberately starts quarrel with Ronny. Forster puts, "What indeed is there to say? To be or not to be married, that was the question, and they had decided it in the affirmative." (40) Adela decides to marry Ronny. Ronny considers marriage as social convention.

The second section of novel takes us to description pre history. It is about Marbar caves. A visitor to these caves comes back with feelings of frustration and total emptiness because caves seem to repeat endlessly a message of nothingness. Aziz plans to visit Marbar caves. He first forgets the invitation he has given to Mrs. Moore and Adela. He plans transport, food, seating and other necessary things. Fielding and Godbole miss the train. Mrs. Moore and Adela are going to caves. Visit to first cave proves horrible to Mrs. Moore. She looks into dark emptiness of the caves and it is if she had seen in it a universe of negation in which good and evil, life and death do not matter. She starts thinking about it. Her entire life and basis upon which she had built it fall to pieces and she is left panic and emptiness. She thinks of echo sound. Echo suggests unity but it does not have love, goodness and understanding. She feels uninterested in everything around her.

Echo which disturbs Mrs. Moore also affects on Adela's mind. When she visits caves with Aziz. She thinks about her proposed marriage with Ronny. When she enters the cave, she thinks about horror of marriage with Ronny. Adela feels someone is attacking her in evening time at caves. She thinks of Aziz and accuses Aziz for attempt to rape her. She goes mad and runs to police station and sends Aziz to jail. Aziz has been arrested. Fielding goes to find out the reason and condition at that time he came to know that Aziz have been



decided guilty by British. Fielding found conspiracy against Aziz. Fielding decides to help Aziz because he is innocent.

Fielding was curious about reaction of Godbole about the arrest of Aziz. He is as usual detached about the whole affair and does not bother about goodness of Aziz. He replies with Hindu philosophy of good and evil. He says whether Aziz attacks on Adela or Adela become victim of evil in cave or it is matter of her imagination all this is not important for Godbole. Godbole thinks that evil has the power to come out and attack in caves.

Aziz has been arrested and the British community in Chandrapore has been confirmed in its racial prejudice against Indians. After few days Adela tries to recover from shock of caves. Echo keeps ringing in her ear. Mrs. Moore remains too shocked by the terror of her vision at the caves. When Mrs. Moore meets Adela, she comes to know that Aziz is innocent.

Mrs. Moore leaves for England. She starts journey by train. She finds her freedom from the terror which gripped her in caves. On her way, she finds beauty of India. Adela was called to court for evidence. Trial begins, Mrs. Moore's name comes as witness but she was kept away from case. In court when Mrs. Moore's name was announced, it transformed to 'Esmis Esmoor' and people outside court start chanting same. Adela remembers that her entry into caves was connected with her thoughts about marriage. She was thinking about Ronny with whom she never likes to marry. She knows him but never loved him. She thinks marriage with Ronny is nothing but rape so she cried rape. She confesses to court that she had made a mistake about Aziz. Aziz declared innocent. Adela has been abandoned by everyone. She had sacrificed herself to the Indian at the trial but she is now rejected by the Indians. Adela and Fielding decides to go to caves to find out the truth but they suffer from limitations. Relationship between Fielding and Aziz begins to be infected with misunderstanding and distrust.

Novel shifts from caves to temple at last. It provides a vision of reconciliation. It dissolves artificial human barrier created in earlier part of novel. Here we observe spirit of Mrs. Moore and the spirit of Hinduism begin to work together to bring reconciliation and unity. It takes place in the Hindu town Mau which is celebrating birth anniversary of Lord Krishna. Godbole is leading the ceremony. Everyone dances in ceremony. Forster seems to suggest that this is where Hinduism has an advantage over other religion: though it is mystical experience available it is open to all. Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of



God. God is not born yet--that will occur at midnight--but He has also been born centuries ago, nor can He ever be born, because He is the Lord of the Universe, who transcends human processes. He is, was not, is not, and was. He and Professor Godbole stood at opposite ends of the same strip of carpet. (124)

In spite of the release of affection everywhere through festival, everything was not all right. When Aziz and Fielding meet each other there is no relation as before. Aziz says that he wish no Englishman or no Englishwoman to be his friend. Spirit of Mrs. Moore, spirit of Hinduism and rainy season brings reconciliation and unity in personal relations. In last part of novel Aziz and Fielding are friend once again. They thanks for reconciliation to Hindu festivals. They move for jungle trip at Mau. Friendship is nothing but answer to echo of caves. Forster expects at last that an Englishman may after all be friends with an Indian, at least at some future time.

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