



THE CONFRONTATION OF CULTURE IN E. M. FORSTER'S "A PASSAGE TO INDIA"

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Abstract

This research paper demonstrates the impossible relationships between the English and the Indians during the colonial period through the story of Dr. Aziz and Adela Quested. *A Passage to India* is a good example of how different cultures misunderstand each other and what ramifications stalk from those misunderstandings. The novel is filled with the motifs of separateness and gaps. The novelist describes the reality of the relationship between the two cultures and races. The relationship of the colonizers and the colonized creates some bitter differences that cannot be crossed. Forster explores the attitude of the colonizers who believe only in authority, domination and submission but not in relations. This research paper explores the distorted relationship and cultural conflicts between Anglo-Indian and Indian or Hindu and Muslims. *A Passage to India* is a representative novel by E. M. Forster. His insightful exploration of the relationship between Britain and the colonial India in early 20th century guarantees it a seat among the classics of the world's colonist literature. This paper demonstrates on the themes of the gap between the two races -the personal relationships and the complex problems are brought to the forefront. The mindset of the Indians is realized through the character of Aziz and Forster openly brings out the idea of the natives as being superior to the West. The possibility of a friendship between the Indians and the English is brought out in the novel but at the same time it seems impossible because both are distinctive in their character and feature.

Introduction

This research paper deals with the conflict between civilizations. In *A Passage to India* the conflict between the British culture and the Indian culture is demonstrated in various forms. To demonstrate these conflicts Forster presents a wide range of elements particular to each culture. He includes not only people of the two countries as part of the conflict but also other elements relating to the general make-up of the cultural and environmental context of the two countries. Fielding and Dr. Aziz wish that their friendship might continue but "the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart," and "the earth didn't want it,

sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file" (Forster, p. 289).

The study comes to the conclusion that bridging the gap between the social and cultural structures of two different nations cannot be brought about by use of force. Similarly the question of compromise between cultures can be effected only by creating harmony between cultures rather than integration and annihilation of one culture on account of the other. Thus removing the cultural and social barriers between different cultures inevitably demands obliterating the causes which bring about such divisions. Literature forms a major part in the interaction between nations.

Right from the beginning till the ending of the novel *A Passage to India* picturizes India as a holy nation known for its ageless history ruled by the British people. The meeting of Aziz and Mrs. Moore display the distinction between two countries and civilization in general the Eastern and the Western civilization and their upper hands of one over the other. The British fail to agree with India and Indians that they are perfect in their own style and tradition on which the British is just enforcing its power and strength in a brutal manner. *A passage to India* is regarded as Forster's greatest novel which stands as a valuable critique of British rule in India. Forster's works deal with the failure of a human being able to communicate satisfactorily and their failure to eliminate prejudice to establish a possible relationship. E.M. Forster is a humanistic writer. His main belief is that individual human beings fail to connect because the humanistic virtues, tolerance, sympathy and good temper are ineffective in this world of religious and racial discrimination. However, he also believes that personal relationships can succeed because values and noble impulses do exist within human nature. Forster's *A Passage to India* was written at a time when the end of the British colonial presence in India was becoming a very real possibility. As a result racial conflict between the British and Indians was a recurrent happening in India. Forster gives equal time to analyzing Indian culture. Forster portrays many religious and cultures of the country which are part of the reason that India remains so internally divided. The novel is divided between Anglo-Indians and Indian natives. The town of Chandrapore is divided into two parts the English civil station and the native section. Another important issue that was seen at that time was the mutual prejudices of Hindus and Muslims as their relationship are not cordial. They get closer to each other only to their common stand. One can easily see that the English treat the Indians with a lack of respect and the Indians seem to expect it.

Cultural misunderstanding is turned into a major theme in the novel. Different cultural ideas and expectations regarding hospitality, social properties and the role of religion in daily life are responsible for misunderstandings between the

English and the Indians. Aziz tells Fielding at the end of the novel "It is useless discussing Hindus with me. Living with them teaches me no more. When I think I annoy them, I do not. When I think I don't annoy them, I do.... Why so curious about them?"(288). Forster expresses how these repeated misunderstandings become hardened into cultural stereotypes and are often used to justify the uselessness of attempts to bridge the cultural gulf. These conflicts have resulted from the cultural and social differences which cause tension between the Indian and the British characters. For these variations, the Indian fail to enjoy the eternal union and finally divided into two parts on the basis of racial belief. Adela also shows her ignorance of Indian customs when she asks Dr Aziz how many wives she has. The Turton set a party to bridge the gap between East and West but this event emphasizes the tension that exists between the two cultures. Forster explains that relationship between the different races does not work smoothly in the imperial India. There are the problems of status, career and power that divide the British from the native people. There are in addition prejudices and feelings of superiority of the British. Ronny Heaslop is ignorant and major calendar boasts about torturing an injured Indian youth. Mc Bryde expresses arrogant views of the lust the Indian show for white women. Miss Dereck shows anger towards Indian employers and MrTurton is imperious towards the Indians. This racism shows in the Anglo-Indians attitudes towards the Aziz after the incident in the Marabar Caves. Mr Mc Bryde feels that Aziz's pretends to be a good person in fact he is a negative minded person and his brutal and cruel action to an English lady cannot be forgiven. Aziz is against the British at the beginning however he begins to change his opinion after meeting Mrs. Moore in the Mosque. This is also the threshold of a friendship between Fielding and Aziz. If the Indians and British treated each other as Aziz and Fielding did then it would be possible for members of the two nations to be friends. But at last it proved wrong because as long as the colonialists rule the colonized they will always resent one another. The culture and racial differences and personal misunderstandings

separate Aziz and Fielding. In his conversation with Fielding, Aziz tells the cause that the Indians tolerate the British are only for the political reason. In the novel Forster uses themes – the gap between people of different races and the need for personal relationships. It further presents the complex problems which are to be found in the relationships between the English and the native people in India. In the novel the ruling Anglo-Indians think of their rule as a burden nobly borne by them in order to civilize the native barbarians. This imperialistic prejudice results in the division of the rulers and the ruled, the Whites and the colored. The British people consider themselves owners of the Indians believing that they are culturally and racially superior to them therefore they were sure of winning the case against Dr. Aziz. Mrs. Moore and more likely Mr. Fielding represent the bridge which is supposed to weld the fissure between the two nations. Mrs. Moore's intended absence from the process of Dr. Aziz's trial and Mr. Fielding's ineffectiveness in changing the proceedings of the trial widen the gap between the two cultures and make it difficult even for the friends to continue their relationship normally: "Why can't we be friends now? Said Fielding. "It's what I want. It's what you want." Aziz replies:

"Down with the English anyhow. That's certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you ..." (Forster, p. 289).

The characters in the novel are forced into confrontation with India which represents reality at its most complexes. Forster pours out his own conception of colonized India based on his several visits to India. In the beginning of the novel the characters are discussing as to whether it is possible to be friends with the English man or not. Further it brings to picture the existence of bribe which the British people practiced in India. They accept it and do nothing. Mrs. Moore is a British woman who has perfect understanding of India and has good understanding of the Indians. Mrs. Moore and Adela are the British women who come to India

to understand the "real" India. They present caves as "dark caves". Here Forster brings to light the mindset of the Indian who with the character of Aziz strongly condemns the imperial power of the rulers because the British people want to enforce their culture and civilization but through Aziz Forster openly brings out the idea of the natives that their own practice and ideology is far better than the ruler's concept and practice. The echo from the caves is like the voice of the oppressed native people. They try to convey their emotion that nowhere the natives remain silent and definitely they will rage against their difficulties. The reference to Chandrapore as a place of immense heat dramatizes the consequences or the impact of the rulers over the natives.

The novel talks about the possibility of friendship between an Englishman and an Indian which will bring the possibility of friendship between the East and the West. The rulers do not have real sympathy for the suffering of the people meant to be ruled. They simply oppress the natives with their language, showy culture and influencing tactics. They never concentrate on empowering and enhancing the lives of the natives instead they wish and plan to loot the wealth, enduring knowledge, etc. When Aziz and Fielding meet one another again in the last section of the novel there is no joyous reunion between the friends. Even when the misunderstanding is cleared the conversation goes badly and the meeting ends with a complete separation between the two men. Aziz is paradoxically the instrument of reconciliation between himself and the British people. In the last section Aziz and Fielding start talking frankly and intimately about politics. They realize that their characters and way of life have changed radically for them to be able to continue as close friends. They have never been closer than now and they speak more as an Englishman and an Indian than as Fielding and Aziz or both are angry and excited. Aziz begins to shout or Fielding mocks him and Aziz is enraged. They bring their horses nearer to embrace each other but the horses swerve apart. This suggests that sub-human India is hostile to inter-racial friendships and therefore their union is transitory. The novel as a whole symbolizes the

notion that the peaceful union and perfect understanding or friendship between East and West is highly impossible because both are distinctive in their own character and feature which is far beyond the acceptance.

Thus the confrontation between the English and the Indians appears to be a racial one. The novel also demonstrates the issue of nationalism, colonialism and racism. The political pressure is also represented in this novel with social issues of British in India. The friendship of Aziz and Fielding is shown as a friendship between colonizers and colonized and the main difference between them is the difference of race.

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