

Cultural Conflicts in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Review Article

E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* is often regarded as a masterpiece. In the novel, Forster focuses on personal relationships rather than political themes like colonization and the dominance of British forces in India. He fosters that love, affection, and intimacy are the ideal vehicles for bringing the native Indian and the Anglo-Indian closer together, but he has a lot of trouble portraying the events since the Indian in *A Passage to India* keep on desiring freedom from British domination and rule. Colonialism is a form of control that entails the enslavement of one person by another. The British colonized India leaves their mark on many aspects of life and culture. For this purpose, this article would like to examine Forster's treatment of the colonial concerns between the east and west through the art of characterization and plot construction.

Keywords: Forster, Dr Aziz, Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Indians, British.

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COLONIALISM IN INDIA

In India, colonialism is frequently misunderstood as a military victory. The success of British colonialism in India is due to subtle forms of control. As a result, colonialism is defined as a project of mind control over colonized people. Colonial knowledge, according to Orwell (1946), has enabled conquerors to govern and divide the occupied nation into several groups. Traditional cultural forms in civilizations are freshly classified and they are reconstructed and modified as a result of this type of knowledge. It has given rise to new divisions and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, and the west and the east.

Imperialism, according to Said (1994), is not a single historical event but rather a series of interdependent discourses between subjects and the empire's hegemonic discourse. Colonialism has indeed been declared to be over, but there are still implicit assumptions that support an empire that keep utopian visions of a country free of oppression and limit the imagination of equality and justice (Said 35).

Albert Memmi discusses colonialism in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1974). Different characters in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924)

embody various ideas. One of the novel's central themes is the cultural mismatch between the colonizer and the colonized people. Using the British colonial occupation of India, the concept of colonialism is better understood. A connection between an Indian doctor and a British schoolmaster is examined during the prosecution of the doctor based on a false charge.

According to Abu Baker (2006), it is difficult to build friendships between the English and Indians in a situation of colonization and colonialization. In the novel, Forster highlights the formatting process for arrivals to become like other colonialist settlers in belief and practice (Baker 68-69). Imperialistic duties in the tropics strain British characters' ideological assumptions about their inherent superiority over the Indian people, but they also realize that the British Empire's existence is only possible if these assumptions are based on a version of reality that makes sense for the British Empire's existence. *A Passage to India* is a work of realistic fiction renowned for the accuracy with which it portrays historical conditions and cultural clashes between Europeans and the indigenous peoples with whom they come into contact.

Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is a book about colonists and colonized individuals. Profit, privilege, and usurpation define the colonizer. Exile is a

typical feeling among colonial-dwelling Europeans. Because they may live more comfortably in the colony, they hesitate to return to their home country. The colonizer states, "A colony is a place where one earns more and spends less" (Memmi 5).

Throughout the novel, Fielding and Aziz study and directly experience the constraints of inter-racial friendship within a colonial context. In the novel, while Aziz and other people were discussing Indian education. He considers it unfair that an Englishman holds a teaching position when there are qualified Indians available. Fielding is unable to provide the right solution to this conversation, which is that England holds India for her benefit. Fielding, on the other hand, is delighted to be in India. Therefore, he and other British find India to be a desirable travel destination. The primary objective of British colonialism is to amass wealth through the exploitation of natives. The British defended their actions to the world and themselves and exposed the cultural and personal identity of the colonized.

Memmi contends that the colonial system is inherently unsustainable and will be dismantled due to its rigidity (126). Assimilation, which involves altering his condition by changing his skin, is impossible because the colonizer never desires it, and all colonized individuals who have attempted it have been misled. According to Memmi, the opposite possibility is a revolt, which is as certain as assimilation failure. The colonized strives for independence since he is unable to alter his circumstances in concordance and cooperation with the colonizer (Khrisat 29).

Postcolonialism

The term "postcolonial" refers to a large area that includes both former British Empire colonies and other European countries. There is also a lengthy history of postcolonial and colonial criticism. Franz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi Thiong have written books on colonial system in the 1950s and 1960s that attempted to "decolonize the brains of the colonized" (Lothe, Holden Ronning, and Young 10). In his book *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (1997), Bart Moore-Gilbert contrasts postcolonial high theory, which was established by critics concentrating on French theorising, and postcolonial critique.

Johan Schimanski (2001) defines postcolonialism as "a globalizing tendency, taking an interest in not just the literature of the colonized but also the literature of the colonizer" (138). "We all live in a world formed by colonialism," says The English Patient, and "we all live in a world formed by colonialism" (Schimanski 139). The path of Aziz and Kip from assimilation to revolt is recognized in postcolonial discourse, and cross-cultural dialogue and the question of identity are major themes in postcolonial discourse.

Edward Said was one of many eastern thinkers who lived in both worlds: east and west. Said is regarded as the father of Orientalism and a pioneer of postcolonial theory. He was born in Jerusalem but moved to the United States in 1951 after being expelled from Cairo's Victoria College. This lifetime exile, he claims, has enabled him, as an intellectual Oriental, to see things from alternative viewpoints. With his *Orientalism*, he flipped the world upside down, questioning our western values that have become universal today, both in the east and the west.

Said (1978) claims that:

without examining *Orientalism* as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period (Said 3).

Colonial Conflicts in *A Passage to India* (1924)

Forster has presented the colonial concern in *A Passage to India*. India is a colonized country in which the colonizers, who view themselves as superior, and the colonized, who are viewed as inferior, coexist in the same society and interact directly with one another. Forster presents the colonial situation as follows: Adela has absolutely no interest in engaging in conversation with or modelling herself after Indian women. Because these two groups come from different cultures, there is also miscommunication between them; this tension is evident in their social contacts, such as when Aziz invites Mrs Moore, Adela, and other English women to visit the Marabar Caves. Because he is concerned about the cultural differences and fears offending the women due to cultural insensitivity, he aims to tailor the holiday as much as possible to English standards. This demonstrates how difficult it was for English people and Indian people to communicate socially with one another. Even when both parties have the greatest of intentions, the tensions and disparities between them make it difficult for them to interact in a casual setting. This is demonstrated by the fact that Fielding and Godbole are unable to catch their train due to the error (Khrisat 28).

Forster appeared to observe the English Empire from a critical rather than sentimental perspective. The novel's core theme is the complex interplay between the Indians and the English. It is an effort to understand India and its people from a more personal, optimistic, and meaningful perspective. It offers little prospect for social connection between Europeans and Indians or Indian national independence (Boehmer 101). Aziz's trial reveals all of the colonial tensions and prejudices between Indians and the British colonial rulers of India. Even before Darwin, colonialism was usually considered a competition to determine the fittest. According to Boehmer:

If colonization was a struggle for supremacy, not only of white against black but between European nations, the scramble for territory took on the aspect of a conflict between competing virilities (Boehmer 80).

The colonialists are the more powerful race, and they rule over the indigenous people in India. They are powerful as a result of their authority, which they wield over the inferior Indians (Boehmer 10). The Indians are viewed as weak, misfits, and citizens of second-class status. They are distinguished from Europeans, especially the English. Even though the British have diverse socioeconomic classes and religions, they are more bonded than the natives (Boehmer 67). There is generally little social integration between colonialists and Indians. They are more sophisticated than the whites. (Georgii 4)

Before writing his novel, Forster spent considerable time in India. When he returned to England, he told his friends that he never felt comfortable at the English Club, but that he was always content when surrounded by Indians. Looking back on that first visit of mine to India, I realize that mixed up with the pleasure and fun was much pain. The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me. It was not a tourist's outing, and the impression it left was deep (Forster 11).

In a letter Masood, an Indian friend of E. M. Forster, while residing in England, writes as follows about the novel.

When I began the book, I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go; my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested in whether they sympathize with one another or not. Not interested as an artist; of course, the journalistic side of me still gets roused over these questions (Forster 15).

Forster validated a statement made by a Victorian writer, William Arnold, ten years after the publication of his novel: "Until the point of divergence between Eastern and Western mind has been found, cooperation is impossible" (Boehmer 150). After the tragedy in the caves, the Anglo-Indians' sentiments toward Aziz reflect the colonial struggles. Mr McBryde believes that Aziz portrays himself as a respected member of society by obtaining a government position, but that he is living a double life. His nasty lifestyle has taken over his decent persona. Aziz, in the opinion of McBryde, treats an English lady unjustly and violently and cannot be forgiven. The cop, like many colonialists, is ready to blame the Indians. "I'm afraid it's conceivable; when an Indian gets bad, he goes not just bad, but also weird" (Forster 177). "All unfortunate natives are criminals at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude. They are not to blame, they

have not a dog's chance – we should be like them if we settled here" (176). Mr Turton claims that "when English people and Indians strive to be acquainted socially, nothing but calamity results" (182). In his opinion, contact, as well as courtesy, should be permitted, but intimacy should not. Such closeness is only harmful. They can only socialize with each other if they have mutual regard and esteem (Georgii 6-7).

When interacting with the natives, the British consider it necessary to behave following the unwritten laws. The locals are required to observe these unwritten rules in their interactions with colonialists because they defend the interests of the British, which establishes the British as the white superiors. Any modification to these guidelines would put the integrity of the entire system at risk (Boehmer 68). When Indians make England their home, the English often show kindness and deference to their culture and traditions. When these Englishmen move to India, the locals there won't be able to repay their generosity because of cultural differences. These Englishmen's relationships with their pals would have been severed a long time ago if it were not for the Anglo-Indians. When discussing this with Aziz, Hamidullah, an Indian lawyer, argues that: It is impossible here. Aziz! The red-nosed boy has again insulted me in court. I do not blame him. He was told that he ought to insult me. Until lately he was quite a nice boy, but the others have got hold of him (Forster 34).

It is also important to examine Englishmen who relocate to India but have never had any Indian acquaintances back home. Many of them want to be gentlemen and befriend Indians at first, but they are told that this is not acceptable in English society. There is a noticeable shift, and some of these same Englishmen begin to disparage the Indians. This can also be observed in Mr Turton's behaviour: he had been close to the natives at first, but eventually, like everyone else before him, he did not trust any Indian. Fielding is quite nice when he first comes to India, and he strives to be liked and welcomed by the Indians. He chooses to associate with Indians (Georgii 8).

According to Birodkar (2007), tensions between Britain and the colonies have existed since the colonists sought to break free from the British Empire's formidable influence. Even though the British do not want the colonists to manage their own country, they believe that an extension of their country would be better for their economy and authority. Colonialism, on the other hand, alters the social structure and causes the colonized to lose their cultural identity. The novel's main character, Aziz, pays such a high price because he trusts the English woman, Miss Quested, who accuses him of attempting to rape her. He also pays for his connection with Fielding, who, as a result, supports Miss Quested and feels Aziz is attempting to rape her. The friendship between Aziz and Fielding has been

shattered in these circumstances. This is obvious evidence that if such friendship exists between the colonizer and the colonized, it will never last long (Khrisat 28).

At the beginning of the novel, the conflict between the colonizers and the Indians appears to be a racial one. The novel also touches on colonialism, racism, and nationalism. There is a contrast to be made between the British political passions in India and their social difficulties. The novel only mentions political feelings on a few occasions. However, the plot construction serves to accentuate the novel's central theme: the friendship between Fielding and Dr Aziz, an Indian. The scenery on their ride represents the vast disparities between the two characters. The friendship between colonizers and colonizers is doomed to fail.

Throughout the novel, Forster demonstrates the superiority of Englishness over Indianness. "English middle-classness" (Forster 198) is the best way to understand Forster's concept of Englishness, which symbolizes the idealized version of England. His idea of Englishness is best understood as English middle-classness because he was a member of the English middle class and valued Victorian middle-class values throughout his life. Using Englishness as a norm, Forster organizes cultural differences in terms of contrast and antagonism, emphasizing the distinctiveness, originality, and oddity of each culture. According to Forster, cultural and racial distinctions between the English and the Indians are permanent since they are culturally and racially adjusted. Although his handling of English-Indian relations appear confused and troubling, one thing he never doubts is that the English are superior to the Indians and should be allowed to govern them (Naghshbandi and Zarrinjooee 29). Thus, *A Passage to India* is one of Forster's most powerful works, which demonstrates how these two opposing factions frequently misinterpret each other's intentions.

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