

Cynicism and Apathy in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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ABSTRACT: The British writers and critics, based on the Orientalist discourses, portray their own nations and cultures as superior, while the Indians as inferior 'Other'. E. M. Forster's (1879- 1970) *A Passage to India* (1924) is loaded with colonizers' ideology of superiority and presents India, Indians and their culture in a stereotypical way. Having an eye on Edward W. Said's (1935-2003) postcolonial theories, this paper focuses its arguments on examining the operations of the colonizer's ideology in *A Passage to India*, to show to what extent Forster reinforces the colonizers' superior ideology. Moreover, it portrays the racial tension among the Indians. The objective of this paper is to highlight the impossibility of friendship in relation to the cynicism constructed by both the colonizer (British Empire) and the colonized (Indians). In other words, this paper argues that this reality will exist so far as the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized is constructed based on the binary opposition of US/Them. Further, *A Passage to India* exposes the British inherent apathy toward Indians and this stereotypical image intensifies the apathetic mode in British Empire.

Keywords: Cynicism, Apathy, British Empire, Stereotype, US/Them.

INTRODUCTION

A Passage to India is the most controversial of Forster's novels. The majority of critics regard it as his finest work yet no consensus has emerged about its meanings, partly because the book has proven highly responsive to so many approaches. Despite literary criticism's changing focal points over decades, from politics and spirituality through to ethnicity and sexuality, it has always kept *A Passage to India* firmly in its sights because Forster's novel offers fertile ground for the broadest range of analytical and theoretical perspectives. This, in turn, is precisely because of narrative's simultaneous breadth of reference and radical indeterminacy.

The story revolves around four characters: Dr. Aziz, his British friend Mr. Cyril Fielding, Mrs. Moore, and Miss Adela Quested. During a trip to the Marabar Caves (modeled on the Barabar Caves of Bihar), Adela accuses Aziz of attempting to assault her. Aziz's trial, and its run-up and aftermath, bring out all the racial tensions and prejudices between indigenous Indians and the British colonists who rule India.

E.M. Forster, in full Edward Morgan Forster (1879- 1970), British novelist, essayist, and social and literary critic. His fame rests largely on his novels *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924) and on a large body of criticism. Forster's father, an architect, died when the son was a baby, and he was brought up by his mother and paternal aunts. At King's College, Cambridge, he enjoyed a sense of liberation. For the first time he was free to follow his own intellectual inclinations. He gained a sense of the uniqueness of the individual, of the healthiness of moderate skepticism, and of the importance of Mediterranean civilization as a counterbalance to the more straitlaced attitudes of northern European countries.

On leaving Cambridge, Forster decided to devote his life to writing. His first novels and short stories were redolent of an age that was shaking off the shackles of Victorianism. From the first his novels included a strong strain of social comment, based on acute observation of middle-class life. There was also a deeper concern, however, a belief, associated with Forster's interest in Mediterranean "paganism" that, if men and women were to achieve a satisfactory life, they needed to keep contact with the earth and to cultivate their imaginations.

This paper also, based upon the exhaustive analysis of the novel in the light of postcolonial theories, intends to demonstrate that the British official in India invariably consider and treat Indians as stereotypes. It proves that *A Passage to India* is a colonizer discourse and as one form of cynicism strengthens and reinforces the stereotype image of India and Indians. It also exposes the British inherent biased and apathy toward Indians and this stereotyped image intensifies the apathetic mode in British Empire. The analysis also highlights the portrayal of the internal divisions and infighting among the Indians, on social and religious grounds.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Postcolonial studies achieved importance in the 1970s and have been developing until today; hence, postcolonial theory can be more readily attached to a text such as *A Passage to India* by Forster. Edward Said (1935-2003) is the forerunner of critics who challenges Orientalizing the Orient as a considerable issue in the colonial territories. The source of the stereotypes is a collection of prejudicial assumptions about the Orientals that Said calls it Orientalism. The details and disciplines of Orientalism that are often codified based on unauthentic and unreal sources are imposed on the natives. In this way, Orientalist principles characterize the Eastern world based on stereotypes "as an inferior world, a world of irrationality, savagery, backwardness and uncivilized, but identify themselves as a superior world, a world that is rational, progressive and civilized" (Said 1978: 2) that best serves their political, social, and military objectives. Said believes that the Europeans gained knowledge about non-Europeans and used it to maintain power over them. They presume that there are two worlds: the world of "us" and the world of "them." Said maintains that it is not a true division because it causes to separate countries from each other more and more. Said points out that the Europeans see the non-Western people as inferiors. In Forster's *A Passage to India* (1925) stereotypes such as savage and uncivilized are applied strongly to the characters. According to Said, such stereotypical images of the Orientals legitimize the presence of the 'West' as appropriate administrators.

Empire (British) Gaze in A Passage to India

A story of cross-cultural resonance in postcolonial discourse, *A Passage to India*, plays on imperial misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Throughout the novel Forster employs a kind of cynical realism to highlight the impossibilities of cross cultural male bonding, between Aziz, the protagonist, an Indian Muslim doctor and Fielding, the English professor. As his biographer P.N. Furbank notes in his biography on Forster, *E.M Forster: A Life*, using Forster's own words, "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" (106). Such a statement made by the author himself, removes any ambiguities as to the imperial engagement of the narrative which serves as a wry dismissal and futile exploration of a transcultural dialogue. As Sara Suleri notes in her book, *The Rhetoric of British India*, "Forster's discourse of friendship becomes a figure for how the imperial eye perceives race: the literal minutiae of pigmentation and physiognomy serve to rupture a more general vision of an Oriental culture" (137).

In other words, the novel serves to reiterate a patronizing representation of a colony in which the imperial gaze at once takes pride in and yet refuses to offer a more forthright exchange of colonial intimacy. Cross-cultural friendships, like that between Aziz and Adela Quested, and Aziz and Fielding, can provide only misinterpreted notions and cross cultural conflicts, thus no transcultural reconciliation is ever achieved in the narrative. Forster's experiences with India were first forged in 1912-13 and later in 1921 when he was appointed with invaluable material as he wrote *A Passage to India*. They offered him a panoramic and analytical setting of colonial epistemology, in all its myriad contradictions and diversity.

The environment and culture was totally unfamiliar to him India was to later prove a 'muddle', a mystery. As John Colmer notes in his critique of the author's works, *E. M. Forster: the Personal Voice*: "It (India) offered him new dimensions of history, religion, and philosophy, and gave fresh insights into personal relations. The latter came largely from intimate friendships with Indians but also from observation of the strain placed on personal relations by the clash between rulers and ruled, Moslem and Hindu" (137).

Interpreted in postcolonial discursive fields, the narrative offers a bleak hope for any social interaction between the two races as is obvious by the Bridge party held by the Turtons at the very outset of the story. Given ostensibly in honor of Indians, the British at this gathering do all they can to unnerve and belittle their Indian guests, with their intermittent highbrow chatter and complete ignorance of the impact of such behavior on their 'Othered' and the 'marginalized' guests. The narrative offers the reader a complicated hegemonic British colonialism with India as one of its most prized colonies. Exploring the fiction under the rubric of a paradigmatic colonial text, a nuanced eye discerns that the story is indeed a careful 'revisitation' of such a corpus of writing. Forster's novel, having established a relatively modernistic approach to such colonial configurations, reinforces such a theme. Analyzed in postcolonial terms, it presents a retake of a darker colonial rhetoric.

Forster's story is set in the early twentieth century in the fictional town of Chandrapore, British India. The main protagonist Dr. Aziz, a Muslim doctor who strikes up a friendship with Cyril Fielding, an English School Headmaster of an Indian College. Adela Quested and her elderly friend Mrs. Moore arrive around this time in India and befriend Aziz as well. What follows is a cultural misreading of invitations and eventually accusations of rape by a delusional Adela in the controversial Marabar Caves. It is interesting to note how Forster completely disregards the overglorifying of the 'exotic' in his geographical and architectural representations. As the narrative opens with an account of the nondescript town, Chandrapore, the writer employs a condescending and "anti-exotic" (Suleri 144) stance as to the formlessness of the landscape and temples, rendering stereotypical colonizer features void. Forster instead resorts to quite the opposite, and draws the fictional town with a kind of horror and disgust:

Except for the Marabar Caves-and they are twenty miles off-the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. [...] The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. [...] The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down, it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. (*A Passage to India* 5).

In evaluating such a description, the reader is deliberately shifted from exotic and colorful narratives about British India which featured picturesque and exalted discourses about the colonial exchange. But the description is still largely Eurocentric.

As Sara Suleri asserts, it is a mundane geographical appropriation of the colonized land, rendered as a hollow space through which the imperial dialogue is articulated in its imperial ideologies. It is this striking feature of the novel that locates it on the cusp between colonial and postcolonial narrative, in Suleri's words: "the touristic experience of colonialism is deglamourised into mathematical computations of how literally banal the exotic may be" (45). But if detouring from eroticizing India offers an escape route from a colonial paradigm, Forster relies on other stereotypes to reiterate his theme as essentially Orientalized. The manner by which all his Indian characters are portrayed, starting with the protagonist himself, echoes an undercurrent of unauthenticity, simulating, in this regard, old colonial narratives, where the Other was hardly understood.

Aziz is portrayed as a little dark man, whose attractions are never literalized. He is impulsive, prone to thinking quickly and acting upon his feelings. He thinks from his heart, and thus fails. Fielding complains in the novel that: "Aziz's emotions never seem in proportion to their objects", and "Aziz retorts, is emotion a sack of potatoes, so much the pound, to be measured out?" (*A Passage to India* 238). Other Indian characters such as Godbole and Nawab Bahdur have also been caricatured to suit Eurocentric and Anglo-Indian sensibilities. While Godbole is made to stand out as odd in his excessive devotion to

Hinduism and its myriad mythologies, Nawab Bahadur's persona is exaggerated as to the whimsical frailties which might accompany an Indian of good social and financial standing. Rudyard Kipling's classification of Indians as inscrutable, exhibits strange behavior in an even stranger land from which a white man must eventually return. Over such unconvincing characterization, Suleri acutely notes: "over Forster, the discursive ghosts of Burke and Kipling shake hands" (132).

Other key aspects of the novel which follow a colonial paradigm are Forster's subtle but firm dismissal of India's complex cultural and religious ideologies. Here, Forster shows a pattern for making a mockery out of the cultural and social nuances of the 'Other'. It is intriguing in its analytical approach to a White man, how a country with diverse cultures and religions functions becomes a "muddle". Based on Eastern mysticism and mythology, the sound "om" or "aum" has a special significance as it connotes a spiritual connection amongst all living beings. It was the sound created when the universe was created and will be made when the cosmos is annihilated. Hence it is an original sound that permeates all sounds, all words and all languages and all mantras. The sound is uttered reverently before the start and chanting of any prayer or mantra and at its close.

In Hinduism, the sacred sound denotes as a signifier of one ultimate supreme truth that all beings are one. It connotes oneness with the Supreme Being as well. But the writer lampoons such a sound a "boum" and this sound emanates when Adela and Mrs. Moore are at their most vulnerable inside the claustrophobic Marabar Caves. Forster uses Hindu doctrine in his corruption of "aum" and introduces this sound in the fictional caves to highlight his belief of India as a "muddle."

Adela and Mrs. Moore come out of the caves after going through the lowest ebbs of their lives. Forster uses this sound to reiterate his theme of the utter failure of such complex religious ideologies and beliefs. The Anglo-Saxon

race is the master race and there can never be equality with other races except for the role of master and slave, colonizer and colonized, civilized and uncivilized. In keeping with the themes of imperial narrative, Forster emphasizes the friendship between the two characters, Aziz and Fielding, as essentially nationalist in character. Fielding is patronizing in his attitude as befits an Englishman in Anglo-Indian society, and Aziz is too quick to judge and easily offended by trivial slights, which Forster seems to argue, is an Indian trait. Even Mr. Turton, the collector, as he testifies against Aziz in the Court, reiterates as much:

I have had twenty five years experience of this country, and during those twenty five years I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy never, never. The whole weight of my authority is against it. (*A Passage to India* 153)

The fear of sinking 'racially' through contact with an inferior race is paramount in *A Passage to India*. Firstly, Aziz "invites his incongruous company to visit him in the Marabar Caves; in the course of this exposure to an unknown but erotic category, he further invites upon himself the imperial accusation of rape and a subsequent realization of how impossible it is to maintain the brotherhood of cross-colonial intimacy" (Suleri 142).

Such invitation on the part of Aziz paves the way for all his miseries and casts aspersions on his "good" name. Even his friendship with Fielding is affected as a result of the incident in the Marabar Caves. What starts as a promising friendship between the two characters which had the potential of overlooking cultural and racial boundaries ultimately breaks under the strain of Aziz's tainted reputation and his unfounded distrust of Fielding later. As the story draws to a close, they part on a strained note:

"Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want? But the horses didn't want it they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders pass singly file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices: "No, not yet," and the sky said: "No, not there." (*A Passage to India* 306)

This sense of English pride coupled with a patronizing stance towards India is all-pervading in the narrative, though he himself takes an anti-imperialist stance in certain sections. The most prominent metaphor is the fictional Marabar Caves, a complex of dark and mysterious spaces, which house secrets that are paradoxical to the human psyche. They stand for an India which is inscrutable to Westerners. As Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore explore the caves, their experiences are varied but for both, very negative. This misunderstood appropriation of India, like the mystical cave complex, renders it a geographical, cultural and spiritual hollowness. But such a negation also brings resignation to the colonizer.

Forster hardly envisaged independence for "muddled" India, but as Colmer notes "in *A Passage to India*, the reader is made to feel the blindness and stupidity of imperial rule, but it is clear that the removal of that rule would not bring Utopia, only a different set of problems. History has borne this out" (169). In Suleri's words, the Marabar Caves are allowed no containment. They connote the hollow vastness of India, its ill-perceived boundaries and thus, its lack of any identification. Throughout the narrative, instances of India escaping definition abound and take the form of metaphors. For example, an exchange between Adela and Ronny Heaslop in the fiction goes like this, when they talk about a peculiar bird:

"Bee-eater."

"Oh, no, Ronny, it has red bars on its wings."

"Parrot, he hazarded."

"Good gracious no."

"The bird in question dived into the dome of the tree. It was of no importance, yet they would have liked to identify it". (*A Passage to India* 78)

Characters such as Mrs. Turton, Mrs. McBryde and Miss Derek also stand as metaphors for a "haughty insulation" of the Anglo-Indian society towards the Indians. However "Orientalized" in his views about India and Indians, Forster could not relate to the affectations and pretentiousness of the Anglo-Indian society. In Beer's words, "Forster, avoids direct moral statements" (20). Even though the putative theme of anti-imperialism resists this notion, the novel is essentially a revalidation of a colonial rhetoric. Darker and understated as to its jingoistic imperial sentiment, it does little to address the questions of cross-cultural and ethnic identities and brings to the fore, in postcolonial discourse, the impossibility of cross-cultural intimacy in imperial textual representations.

Having invariably reconciled cultural differences between the two polarities of race, Forster manages to bring about some semblance of a hopeful compromise by accepting the spirituality of India. An example of this is the "wasp" that is present in Mrs. Moore's room when she goes there to hang up her cloak and her loving acceptance of it. Later the "wasp" reappears as Professor Godbole invokes the memory of Mrs. Moore when she has died en route her voyage to England. The wasp symbolizes the spiritual approach to the truth that all beings are one and connected;

Mrs. Moore, the wasp, Dr. Aziz. But to denote the significance of the above-mentioned metaphors only applies in a quantitative analysis of an "orientalised" India.

Adela Quested's "Real India": State of Cynicism

Forster's India is hostile to foreigners and attacks its colonizers ferociously, so as to force them to leave. Despite the British attempts to 'tame' India, it remains a 'wild' country: "The destiny of the English seems to resemble their predecessors', who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust" (*A Passage to India* 199). The narrator wonders:

How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home. India knows of their trouble. She knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls 'Come' through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. *But come to what?* She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal. (*A Passage to India* 127)

India refuses to give a sense of home to its colonizers. Hence, they remain in 'exile'. It is hard on them as well and therefore, the houses they build are only 'retreats' in which to hide from its aggressive nature. The Marabar Caves serve as an example of this promise/appeal binary. Fielding sees them from the Club as "beautiful" (*A Passage to India* 178).

However, seeing them close up makes one notice that "nothing was to be seen on either side but the granite, very dead and quiet." Even the sky there "seemed unhealthily near" (*A Passage to India* 131). The caves appear to be "fists and fingers" (*A Passage to India* 7) thus exposing their hostility. Indeed, India makes sure that no colonizer can call it home. Hence, when the Anglo-Indians "looked out at the palisade of cactuses stabbing the purple throat of the sky; they realized that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood" (*A Passage to India* 170). India and its creatures refuse "refashioning", labeling and framing "Nothing in India is identifiable; the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge into something else" (*A Passage to India* 78).

Adela Quested is troubled by this conventionalized role. She comes to India to see its wonders and to connect with its people. Her first moments of seeing Ronny are telling because they show her reluctance to take upon herself the role of the British administrative archetype. She marvels at how he has changed and how unsympathetic he is to those he rules over. This idea is something that haunts her as she continually struggles with the role she must take on if she marries Ronny and remains in India. She has a hard time reconciling the notion of the India she sees with that she must be a part of.

In front, like a shutter, fell a vision of her married life. She and Ronny would look into the club like this every evening, then drive home to dress; they would see the Lesleys and the Callenders and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite them and be invited by them while the true India slid by unnoticed. (*A Passage to India* 48)

Apart from the pervasiveness of the Indian atmosphere and setting and the central female character's response or lack of response to it. Adela as a new comer in India who attempts to ignore and even to shun the social and political barriers already set up by her predecessors, their exiled fellow countrymen who have tried to make this alien land their 'home'. "I want to see the real India" (*A Passage to India* 21), Adela announces, the India of her dreams of romance and adventure. If seeing the real India means that she must see Indians, as Fielding suggests, then Adela will ignore the warnings of the sahibs at the club and go her own way, with the challenge and promise of personal growth ahead of her.

Although there is, from Adela's introduction in the novel and throughout, a sense of delusion and play about her quest, in fairness to Adela she does instinctively dislike the bigotry, superiority and insularity of the club. She is anxious to express her own views and elude the will of the group to make her one of their own. She is weak in this respect. She refers to this weakness as her "Anglo-Indian difficulty," (*A Passage to India* 136), as though she is afraid or unable to define it for what it is, and consequently minimizes it. For when she does attempt friendship with an India, the results are disastrous.

The bird that Adela and Ronny see at the Club escapes being labeled. They would have liked to identify it, "it would somehow have solaced their hearts" (*A Passage to India* 78). India, however, denies them the satisfaction. It proves to be very elusive. Similarly, Adela's desire to see the "real India" is never fulfilled (*A Passage to India* 21). Further, the attempt to identify the animal which hit Nawab's car also proves to be a failure. "The road had been used by too many objects for any one track to be legible, and the torch created such highlights and black shadows that they (Adela and Ronny) could not interpret what it revealed." (*A Passage to India* 82). It is as if India conspires with earth and light to obscure these tracks. To the Sahibs, India is quite different from Europe. In Europe, "life retreats out of the cold, and exquisite fireside myths have resulted". (*A Passage to India* 199)

In India, however, "the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful" (*A Passage to India* 199). Ronny notes that "there's nothing in India but the

weather [...] it's the alpha and omega of the whole affair" (*A Passage to India* 45). India's hostility to its colonizers is demonstrated in the heat, which becomes so problematic to the English. "The sun is crashing on their backs," and they are "pursued by stabs of hot air" (*A Passage to India* 158, 148). Hot weather is also depicted as a "monster" (*A Passage to India* 186). Lady Mellanby, hence, calls India a "frying-pan" (*A Passage to India* 198).

The hostility of India is further highlighted when compared with the depiction of other places in the novel such as Egypt. Egypt is warm and loving. "Egypt was charming a green strip of carpet". Also, "with Egypt the atmosphere altered. The clean sands, heaped on each side of the canal, seemed to wipe off everything that was difficult and equivocal" (*A Passage to India* 265). This romantic depiction probably stems from the Elizabethan era in which Egypt is mostly depicted as a land of sexual promise and as an embodiment of the charms of the East in Elizabethan plays, Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* being an example. In Alexandria, Fielding feels the difference between India and Egypt. "Bright blue sky, constant wind, clean low coastline, as against the intricacies of Bombay" (*A Passage to India* 265). Egypt welcomes the West though it is in the East. The statue of Lesseps symbolizes this loving relationship between the East and West in Egypt. It "turns to the East" and "returns to the West" (*A Passage to India* 250). The idea of Egypt welcoming the West is also highlighted when the ghost of Mrs. Moore is "shaken off" the ship as it enters the Suez (*A Passage to India* 243).

Venice is also different from 'hostile' India. "The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong. Fielding had forgotten the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills; indeed, without form, how can there be beauty?" (*A Passage to India* 265). India has nothing pleasing to offer to its colonizers. Moreover, India refuses a friendship between a native and a colonizer. The arrival of Ronny during Fielding's tea-party ruins the friendly mood. "It was as if irritation exuded from the very soil" (*A Passage to India* 71). The sky also turns "angry orange" to express its objection to the presence of the colonizers (*A Passage to India* 128). In the last part in the novel, Aziz informs Fielding that their friendship is only possible once the British leave India. This scene clearly exposes the land's rejection of such a friendship under the colonizer/colonized status-quo. Fielding asks:

'Why can't we be friends now?' [...] 'It's what I want. It's what you want. But up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there'. (*A Passage to India* 306)

Indeed, Forster acknowledges the need for India to be free before such a friendship can take place and he knows at the same time the problematic issues involved in the effort to set India free. Anglo-Indians, the 'experienced' colonists, force their own stereotypes of the natives upon newcomers. The colonizers arrive fresh from England "intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do. Hence, they all become exactly the same not worse, not better" (*A Passage to India* 9). Ronny Heaslop complains that "people are so *odd* out here, and it's not like home one's always facing the footlights [...] They notice everything, until they're perfectly sure you're their sort" (*A Passage to India* 44). Individuality is problematic in a colony because the people there should all adopt the same ideologies.

Ronny, like Aziz and the others, is aware of this process of 'formatting' newcomers to render them like other colonists. In fact, Ronny himself underwent that process. Hence, Mr. Turton announces that "Heaslop's a sahib; he's the type we want, he's one of us" (*A Passage to India* 22). Turton's words invoke Paul Scott who remarks that "in India the English stop being unconsciously English and become consciously English" (Childs 24). Further, Adela "thought of the young men and women who had come out before her [...] and had been set down to the same food and the same ideas. These young people have been snubbed in the same good-humored way until they kept to the accredited themes and began to snub others" (ibid 67). Clearly, the powerful discourse of the colony guarantees the generation of people who are "exactly the same" in terms of their ideologies and practices. Ronny adopts the colonizers' model and defends it ferociously.

Ronny realizes the illegitimacy of the British presence in India. Yet, to retain his privileges and to remain an accepted, as well as respected part of the colony, he tries hard to convince himself and others of the legitimacy of the British presence in India. He interrogates his mother:

Did you gather he [Aziz] was well-disposed?" Ignorant of *the force of this question*, she replied, "Yes, quite, after the first moment." "I meant, generally. Did he seem to tolerate us *the brutal conqueror*, the sun-dried bureaucrat, that sort of thing?" (*A Passage to India* 29)

The italicized words reveal Ronny's awareness of the British status as a "brutal conqueror" and his strong desire to protect it from potential threats. Mrs. Moore is shocked at the metamorphosis of her son. "The traces of young man humanitarianism had sloughed off". She thinks that "[o]ne touch of regret [...] would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution" (*A Passage to India* 46). She is also shocked to hear her son's adopted ideological stance. She protests, "[y]ou never used to judge people like this at home" (*A Passage to India* 29). Ronny

announces that “India isn’t home” and relies on “phrases and arguments that he had picked up from older officials, and he did not feel quite sure of himself” (*A Passage to India* 29) to silence his mother and convince her of his adopted new logic.

Racist Assumptions and Cynical View after Marabar Cave Incident

After witnessing the unsuccessful Bridge Party, Adela vows that she will never succumb to Anglo-Indian ideology. Yet, as Jenny Sharpe has noted, in her article “The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter Insurgency” in *Genders*, “the accusations Adela makes against Dr. Aziz seemingly confirm the fears and racist assumptions used to justify imperialism that the “native” world is chaotic, uncontrollable and evil and thus in need of English domination” (25). Following Aziz’s arrest, many of these hateful and unfounded fears are openly manifested.

The District Superintendent of Police, Mr. McBryde, British police officer, has an Orientalist doctrine about the Indians. “All natives who live south of latitude 30 are criminals at heart” (*A Passage to India* 156). The psychology of the people, McBryde tells Fielding, is different in India. The collector declares India to be a “poisonous country” and its people as jackals. The Indians are bad starters, occasionally jib and are possibly cowards. The Indians always do something disappointing. Even Fielding concludes that Indians can be unbearable on occasions. Almost all the British characters believe in the eccentricity, backwardness and supine malleability of the Indians. India is portrayed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts and commerce. Only the English are really unequalled, especially at the time of crisis.

The prevailing attitude is best represented by McBryde’s words at Aziz’s trial. He delivers his opening statement almost apathetic because he believes that Aziz’s guilt is already accepted as fact. The possibility that Aziz may in fact be innocent is never even considered because, as McBryde tells the court, “It is a general truth” that “the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa” (*A Passage to India* 206). But passages such as these do not lend authority to Adela’s allegations against Dr. Aziz. On the contrary, the rhetoric used to justify imperialism is severely parodied.

The scenes paint all ugly picture of the English officers sent to India “to do Justice and keep peace” (*A Passage to India* 45); they become almost ridiculous when it is remembered that the colonizers’ prejudices and fears are aroused by an event that may not have taken place. McBryde’s “general truth” is based not on evidence or, as he claims, scientific fact, but on the assumptions and premises which are necessary to support notions of Western superiority.

Similarly, the mystery surrounding the caves and the events that transpired inside them undermine any sense of certainty in the novel. Adela herself becomes unsure about what actually happened in the caves and is plagued by the echoing doubt that her accusations may have been fabricated. Sharpe has argued that this element of uncertainty, introduced into a crime which supposedly confirms the native’s depravity. However, the novel’s condemnation of imperial ideology is not unproblematic. Benita Parry has noted, in *The Politics of Representation in A Passage to India*, from *E. M. Forster: Contemporary Critical Essays*, that while the text does lampoon colonial rhetoric, its overt criticism of colonialism is phrased in the feeblest of terms. One scene which several Critics have singled out even suggests that colonialism might have been more acceptable had the British only been a little kinder: “One touch of regret [...] would have made” Ronny a different man, and the British Empire a different institution” (135). The novel’s ending is also troublesome. Fielding, the one man who stood against his countrymen to defend Aziz, finally throws in “his lot with Anglo-India by marrying a countrywoman” and “acquiring some of its limitations” (*A Passage to India* 303). He even begins to doubt whether he would repeat his defiance of his own people “for the sake of a stray Indian” (*A Passage to India* 303).

Moreover, there are instances in the novel where the narrator appears to be guilty of making broad generalizations about Indians. Compared to the loud and offensive remarks spoken by McBryde, the narrator’s occasional reinforcement of racial stereotypes is easily overlooked. But seemingly harmless comments “like most Orientals’ Aziz overrated hospitality” (*A Passage to India* 133) do contribute to the West’s textual construction of the East. And, as alluded to above, it is this kind of fabricated report which can eventually become accepted as a “general truth” (*A Passage to India* 206). While narrative comments such as these do not necessarily invalidate the novel’s criticism of colonialism, they do suggest that the Western novelist’s prose about India, like the “pose of seeing India” criticized in the novel, can be a “form of ruling India” (*A Passage to India* 23).

The English Colonizer and Sense of Apathy in Mrs. Moore

The Marabar Caves and their ‘echo’ are complex symbols that seem to work on a number of levels and some of these levels are revealed in the way they affect Mrs. Moore. The echo of the Caves essentially stays with her “and began [...] to undermine her hold on life” (*A Passage to India* 139) and she eventually loses her idealism and her faith because the echo reveals their limitations. In representing the British colonizer at her best, even Mrs. Moore is

dwarfed by the essential apathy of India, an apathy born of a history stretching back to antiquity. In the end, with all their best sentiments and illusions of superiority, India will remember the British as just another short-lived conqueror.

The Caves are dark and empty, signifying nothing in themselves but impersonal eternity, yet the polished walls reflect the visitor's image and the echo becomes the echo of one's limitations. Perhaps this is why those British who have been in India for years cannot be pleasant, must keep the Indian at a distance, must stay clumped together like a "herd," why intimacy with the Indians always brings problems. Not only it would make the job of ruling more difficult, but also cultural and social intercourse might reveal the limitations of the British colonizers and thus the Empire. The British rule of India might ultimately be futile and simply echo back to Britain her illusions, her fears, and her smallness and leave India untouched.

Sense of apathy is revealed in different parts of the novel. Godbole explains that his song is about a milkmaid begging for the Krishna's assistance, and Krishna's failure to appear, Mrs. Moore asks, "But he comes in another song, I hope?" to which Godbole immediately replies, "Oh no, he refuses to come. I say to him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come" (*A Passage to India* 72-73). It is this song that forces Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested into emotional cocoons from which they only escape to meet horrible circumstances: Mrs. Moore is terrorized to the point of apathy, and Mrs. Quested meets horror in the caves.

Although Forster admits that he finds the Hindu religion to be the most agreeable, he obviously does not hesitate to depict the flaws of the religion. Professor Godbole is undeniably distant from the mainstream society, and because of this forbidding remoteness, he can never hope to actually bring about any reforms. Many critics pay special attention to authors' mastery of characterization, but in *A Passage to India*, Forster proves that abstract ideas, such as the Hindu religion, can be developed and portrayed with as much detail as a protagonist.

As a character, Mrs. Moore serves a double function in *A Passage to India*, operating on two different levels. She is initially a literal character, but as the novel progresses she becomes more a symbolic presence. On the literal level, Mrs. Moore is a good-hearted, religious, elderly woman with mystical leanings. The initial days of her visit to India are successful, as she connects with India and the Indians on an intuitive level. Whereas Adela is cerebral, Mrs. Moore relies successfully on her heart to make connections during her visit. Furthermore, on the literal level, Mrs. Moore's character has human limitations. Her experience at Marabar renders her apathetic and even somewhat mean, to the degree that she simply leaves India without bothering to testify to Aziz's innocence or to oversee Ronny and Adela's wedding.

Forster describes the Marabar Caves physically, their great geological age, their lack of shrines, their perfectly polished walls, their rough-hewn, manmade entrances what remains in the mind is their sense of mystery, which he suggests but does not attempt to explain. There is "something unspeakable" in them; visitors come away with uncertain impressions; if the unopened caves were excavated, "nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil" (*A Passage to India* 117). Recall here Godbole's unwillingness to describe the caves; the assumption there is that he understands their mystery, and they are thereby related to Hinduism. It might be suggested that the caves symbolize in part the total negation of self, the complete rejection of the importance of all material things, which is the goal of the practice of Yoga; the sense of such negation and rejection would be terrifying to a totally unprepared person, especially to a Westerner reared in an individualistic environment. Yet even this interpretation is too simple; it will not bear the weight of all that the caves imply in the novel.

Aziz, with his peculiar combination of Eastern and Western thinking, has impulsively invited the guests of Fielding's tea party to an excursion to the Marabar Caves. The irresponsible, courteous Eastern half of his mind made the invitation; the Western half is obliged to carry it out. His plans include a curious, almost ludicrous, mixture of Indian and English entertainment. He provides a "purdah" car on the train for Mrs. Moore and Adela and serves them an English breakfast. At great expense he provides an elephant ride from the train to the caves the one thing to which all tourists are treated and which Adela and Mrs. Moore did not want. Mrs. Moore, with her usual innate understanding, assures Aziz that he is the perfect host. There is an ironic note on the subject of time, for it is Fielding, the Englishman, who misses the train. However, Professor Godbole is the real culprit, for he has been too long at his prayers.

Although the trip is busy with human activity, there is a spiritual atmosphere enveloping the participants. Mrs. Moore and Adela are in a state of apathy dating from the tea party and Professor Godbole's song. The impression that this has made upon them keeps them from being excited about the visit to the mysterious caves. Adela confesses to herself that she cannot get excited over Aziz's arrangements because they will not "bite into her mind," (*A Passage to India* 125) and she resolves to spend the time planning her wedding. Mrs. Moore feels detached from the reality of any human activity, reflecting that "though people are important, the relations between them are not" (*A Passage to India* 126). In her reflections she senses the necessity for an understanding between men, an understanding that has not progressed despite all centuries of human relationships.

The English are unable to understand the mysterious spirituality of India. Mrs. Moore shows some interest in the topic when she first arrives in the country. She likes the idea of “resignation” being passively resigned to the will of God which she associates with Indian thought (*A Passage to India* 196). She is also attracted by the unity of everything in the universe, another idea she associates with India. But the incident in the caves, when she hears the echo, unnerves her. The echo annihilates all distinctions in the name of the unity of life, and also annihilates distinctions between good and evil. This is far from the Christian view of life, at least in Mrs. Moore’s view, and leads her into despair and apathy.

But this is merely a Westerner’s point of view. Against the negative portrayal of Indian spirituality implicit in the “echo” incident is a more positive vision that occurs in the novel. There is no mistaking the joy and affirmative value of the Hindu festival conducted at Mau, in which the birth of Lord Krishna is enacted. Once again, this is rendered largely from the outsider’s point of view, since neither Aziz nor Fielding understands it, but it well represents the “mystery” of Indian spirituality that cannot be penetrated by Westerners.

The clash between Hinduism and Christianity in *A Passage to India* parallels the conflict between the Indians and the English. Hinduism is best represented in the novel by Professor Godbole, and Christianity is epitomized in Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Moore comes to India with the kindness and understanding heart of a devout Christian but leaves morose and peevish. Perhaps she is haunted into this state by Professor Godbole’s strange song:

At times there seemed rhythm, at times there was the illusion of a Western melody. But the ear, baffled repeatedly, soon lost any clue, and wandered in a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible[...] The sounds continued and ceased after a few moments as casually as they had begun apparently half through a bar, and upon the subdominant. (*A Passage to India* 72)

When Godbole explains that his song is about a milkmaid begging for the Krishna’s assistance, and Krishna’s failure to appear, Mrs. Moore asks, “But he comes in another song, I hope?” to which Godbole immediately replies, “Oh no, he refuses to come. I say to him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come” (*A Passage to India* 72). It is this song that forces Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested into emotional cocoons from which they only escape to meet horrible circumstances. Mrs. Moore is terrorized to the point of apathy, and Mrs. Quested meets horror in the caves.

CONCLUSION

Many critics pay special attention to authors’ mastery of characterization, but in *A Passage to India*, Forster proves that abstract ideas can be developed and portrayed with as much detail as a protagonist. Throughout the novel Forster employs a kind of cynical realism to highlight the impossibilities of cultural crossing. The novel serves to reiterate a patronizing representation of a colony in which the imperial gaze at once takes pride in and yet refuses to offer a more forthright exchange of colonial intimacy. Cross-cultural friendships, like that between Aziz and Adela Quested, and Aziz and Fielding, can provide only misinterpreted notions and cross cultural conflicts, thus no transcultural reconciliation is ever achieved in the narrative.

The accusations Adela makes against Dr. Aziz seemingly confirm the fears and racist assumptions used to justify imperialism that the “native” world is chaotic, uncontrollable and evil and thus in need of English domination. Following Aziz’s arrest, many of these hateful and unfounded fears are openly manifested. Interpreted in postcolonial discursive fields, the narrative offers a bleak hope for any social interaction between the two races. Forster shows a pattern for making a mockery out of the cultural and social nuances of the ‘Other’. The novel intrigues in its analytical approach, how a country with diverse cultures and religions functions and therefore becomes a ‘muddle’. Therefore it can be concluded that as far as the image of stereotyping exists the sense of ‘apathy’, one of the qualities that refers to the nature of ‘Englishness’, will be intensified.

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