

Otherness of other in the Eyes of Another: an orientalist Study of E.M. Forester's *A Passage to India*

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Abstract:

Orientalism discusses the binary differences of occident and orient. Edward Said has established this notion in the field of literature in his well known book Orientalism .In this book he has discussed the position of exotic other which involves the religious class between Christianity and Islam that almost began in the seventh century and continues till today. This paper puts forward a comprehensive study of the novel A Passage to India under the cannon of an oriental text from an occident perspectives. Race has functioned as one of the most powerful and yet the most fragile shaper of human identity. The racial identity is actually shaped by perception of religious, ethnic, linguistic, national, sexual and class differences. In the novel A Passage to India E.M. Forster depicts the problem with seeing two cultures as occupying the same world, is that they can be measured with each other and even one preferred to another as a reflection of the world. In this binary world, racial confrontation, transgression and opposition surface repeatedly. The colonized are aware of an authority, of an imposition and hostility between two races, which need to be resisted. In this novel post-colonialism comes to represent a conflict –within one's own self and the conflict in the outside world. There is a quite genuine hatred of muddling, and a suspicion that whatever they do, they will produce disaster. So,

the novel presents a masterly study of racial antagonism of two great races with different heritage and history.

KEYWORDS : Orient, Occident, Confrontation, Post-colonial, Identity, Race, Conflict, religion, Otherness.

In the Indian sub-continent the colonizers differed in their mode of interacting with the local population, and these differences have a profound impact on racial identities. Certainly colonialism has not one but several ideologies which were manifested in hundreds of different institutional and cultural practices. They all fed into a global imbalance as colonialism did have an economic as well as philosophic ideology, although it did not always succeed in either making money or entirely suppressing the people exploited by them. The ideology of racial superiority can be translated easily into class terms. "Above all, it was Islam that functioned as the predominant binary opposite of and threat to Christianity" (Chew, 18). The superiority of white races, here one colonist argued, clearly implies that the black men must for her remain cheap labourers and slaves. Certain sections of people were thus racially identified as the natural working classes. The imperialists forced the population into its natural class line with that representation in order to ensure the material objective of production. When the social order

could no longer be buttressed by legal sanctions it had to depend upon the inculcation in the minds of both exploiters and exploited of a belief in the superiority of the exploiters and the inferiority of the exploited. Now, it can be argued that the doctrine of equality of economic opportunity and that of racial superiority and inferiority are complements of one another.

The historic trends of civilization and barbarism rest on the production of an irreconcilable difference between black and white, self and other. The late medieval European figure of the Wildman who lived in forests, on the outer edges of civilization, was hairy, nude, violent, lacking in moral sense and excessively sensual, expressed all manner of cultural anxieties. The man and his female counterpart were other who existed outside civil society, and yet they constantly threatened to enter and disrupt this society. Such myths intersected with images of foreigners with whom medieval Europeans have some kind of contact. Here, it is important to remember that images of Africans, Truks, Muslims, barbarians, Anthropophagi, men of Inde and other categories have circulated for a long time before colonization. Their images after colonization appeared to coincide with the construction of new colonial discourse. As a matter of fact, all these images about the 'other' were moulded and remoulded, through various histories of colonial contact. Colonialism was perhaps the most important crucible for their affirmation as well as reconstruction. Race has thus functioned as one of the most powerful and yet the most fragile marker of human identity, hard to explain

and identify and even harder to maintain. The racial identity is actually shaped by perception of religious, ethnic, linguistic, national, sexual and class differences. Despite the fact that racial classification may be at several levels a delusion and a myth, it is all too real in its pernicious social effects. Ethnic, tribal and communal groupings are social constructions and identities that have served to both oppress people and radicalize them. As a result colonial regimes manipulated as well as created ethnic and racial identities:

The naturalization of social phenomena and the suppression of historical process which are introduced by its appeal to biological realm can articulate a variety of different political antagonism. (Paul Gilroy, 409)

The problem with seeing two cultures as occupying the same world is that they can be measured by different parametres against each other and one preferred to another as a reflection of that world. In this binary world, racial confrontation, transgression and opposition appears repeatedly in every sphere of the colonial world . The colonized are aware of an authority, of an imposition and a hostility between the two races, which needs to be resisted. They are further aware of the need to recollect their past, the reality of their inheritance and their position, and the imposition of an external power which exploits them economically, mentally, physically and even psychologically .

In *A Passage to India*, post-colonialism comes to represent a conflict-within one's own

self, a conflict through which the natives try to step outside their colonial 'self', the western education the imperial phase and approach their own heritage, traditions, customs and reality from their present position. Forster chooses a subject of racial encounter and the violent reaction from what seems the intolerable race feeling of our fellows, is strong in every clan. It is a study of racial contrasts and dissimilarities:

The subversive potential lies in its capacity to undermine colonial authority as a monolithic structure. On this operation, it opens a space for colonial resistance—a space that might tap the desire of the colonized to uncover and displace the grounds of their oppression, to turn the discursive condition of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha, 154)

The problem of the English in India lies midway between these two greater considerations, linking them up and illuminating the differences of cultural values. In India, there is much more than even race feeling, which is strong enough, to disturb Indians. There is a quite genuine hatred of muddling, and a suspicion that whatever they do, go or stay, they will produce disaster. It is race feeling multiplied by the old Irish situation and by money. It is actually quite amazing that Forster and Masood were able to share as much as they did because the world they belonged to has a very rigid conception of how men should behave with men and more specifically, how white man should treat Blackman. Colonialism, one might say, did not approve of intimacy between the rulers and

the ruled, master and the slave.

Not only did familiarity breed contempt, it also undermines the fundamental premises of authority and separatism that characterizes the colonial administrative system. This position is staunchly upheld by Turton, the prototype of the Burra Sahib in *A Passage to India*, who says, "I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially" (102). In *A Passage to India* Forster attempts to express the incompatibility between East and West that proves to be an obstacle. Forster has tried to reconcile himself to cross a big racial and social gulf. *A Passage to India* calls on resources outside the norms and priorities of western societies summoning other social configuration, ethical codes and philosophical systems evaluations. Forster, always a cultural realist, is amused at the high imperial vision, and applauds the colonial people kicking against imperialist hegemony. Imperialism inflicts a catastrophic dislocation on the worlds it conquers and colonizes, generates new forms of tension within the metropolitan countries and brings the west into a condition of permanent antagonism with other cultures and civilizations novel. Aziz says in this novel :

Clear out, clear out , I say.
Why are we put to so much sufferings? We used to blame you, now we blame ourselves. We grow wiser. Until England is in difficulties ,we keep silent , but in the next European war aha, aha ! Then is our time (315).

Indian connection never—the—less represented as the paradigmatic power relationship, and the encounter possible within the imperialist situations which are perceived as grotesque parodies of social meetings. The chilly British circulate like an ice stream through a land they feel to be poisonous and intending evil against them. British domination rests on force, fear and racism, generating enmity in articulate Indians motivated by memories of past opposition to conquest and mobilized by prospects of the independence to be regained by any means:

Anti—colonial counter—forces, did challenge, subvert and undermine the ruling ideologies, and nowhere more so than in overthrowing the hierarchy of colonizer/colonized, the speech and stance of the colonized referring a position of subjugation and dispensing with the terms of the colonizer’s definitions. (Parry, 176)

It is the politically innocent Mrs. Moore who challenges her son’s brutal racism with an appeal for love and kindness, a gesture towards—humanizing an inhuman situation. On the other hand hostilities increase further as Indian resistance grows and British determination to retain power hardens. Aziz, and the Moslems descended from Mogul warriors, and the Brahmin Godbole whose ancestors were the Mahrattas, may have conflicting recollections of an independent Deccan resisting British conquest, but they are united by their distinctively expressed disinclination to participate in their own subjugation, a shared refusal which culminates in a Hindu—Moslem entente. On the other side, the British make up

their differences and close ranks, with even Fielding throwing in his lot with Anglo-India and so betraying his ideals as revealed by the letter from Heaslop to Fielding:

I’m relieved you feel able to come into line with the Oppressors of India to some extent. We need all support we can get. I hope the next time Stella comes my way she will bring you with her, when I will make you as comfortable as a bachelor can- it’s certainly time we met (302).

The effective influence of liberal codes in colonial situation is established by the catastrophic failure of British and Indians to sustain personal relations. The friendship between Fielding and Aziz, disturbed throughout by differences in standards and tastes of two races, is finally ruptured when each withdraws, as he inevitably must, within the boundaries of the embattled communities, and it is Forster’s consciousness that social connections will fail which sends him in pursuit of spiritual communion between Mrs. Moore and both Aziz and Godbole. The obtuse, coarse, arrogant and bellicose, department of Anglo-India is the very negation of those decencies defined through Fielding. The world, he believes is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence. When Fielding, after his courageous stand against his countrymen and women, aligns himself with the natives of India, he is submitting to the fact of imperialism, deferring to a mode of behaviour and feeling made and needed by an aggressive political

system and also conceding that his liberal principles and hopes of doing good in India exist only by favour of Ronny Heaslop :

There is no solution of the problem of governing India. Our presence is a curse both to them and to us, our going will be worse. I believe that is the last word. And why can not the races meet? Simply because the Indians bore the English. That is the simple adamentative fact. (Forster, 117)

The novel presents a masterly study of racial antagonism of two great races with different heritage and history, neither deigning to understand the other, and one of them on the wrong place. As in this novel Indians and English appears almost as different as cats and dogs. In the speech of a narrow minded English official in *A Passage to India* is clearly depicted the cause of the racial hatred. "I have never known anything but disaster results when English people and Indian attempted to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes, courtesy, by all means, intimacy never-never" (173-4). Forster creates habitually cultivated prejudice of caste and race. The supposed assault on an English girl by a Mohammedan, Dr. Aziz, who has organized an expedition to the famous Marabar caves let loose a storm in Chandarpore. In a series of lightening flashes, all the racial hate, resentment, prejudice, injustice and hysteria all that lie below the surface of Anglo Indian contacts, are revealed and defy all the efforts at

reconciliation. For both sides the episode creates an atmosphere of illusion and shame; prejudices run hot through both communities. Sympathy and intelligence serve to divide the Europeans, on the one side, are the Crustaceans, the Turtons, Major Callender, Ronny Heaslop, whose solidarity is found on unthinking prejudice against the natives, and Fielding, who continues to champion Dr. Aziz, in whose innocence he believes. Mrs. Moore leaves India before the case is heard. Moreover Ronny does not approve of English people taking service under the Native States where they obtain a certain amount of influence, but at the expense of the general prestige. The club of English people has declared that few Mohammedans and no Hindu would eat at an English man's table. Aziz says, "No Englishman understands us..." (310). But the English officials believe, Indians are incapable of responsibility. At last the bomb of racial prejudices explodes, Aziz cries, "clear out all you Turtons and Burtons" (312). Fielding mocks again, and Aziz in an awful rage dances this way and that, not knowing what to do, and cries :

Down with the English any how. That's certain, clear out, you fellow. Double quick, I say We may hate one another but we hate you most. If I do not make you go, Ahmad will, Karim will. If its fifty five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then... you and I shall be friends. (312)

Mr. Forster has shown these racial prejudices impartially. The British may act badly in India but so do the Indians. There is never any

doubt that they need the justice and fair administration that the British give them. It is hostility and lack of communication between the two sides that mark the failure—the old failure to connect. The gap between the two sides is, roughly speaking the gap between head and heart. Forster presents the native as he appears to himself, as he appears to the British officials and as he really is, when his mind is laid bare, displaying a civilization which the west can disturb but will never acquire.

The legal adjudication of the alleged violation by an Indian of English womanhood and thus of English honor is deferred, however, in *A Passage to India* when the purported victim of attack unexpectedly retracts her charges on the witness stand. Some few of the Anglo Indian women community present in the courtroom protest in confusion. “And then the flimsy framework of the court broke up” (219). Later Aziz the defendant, the victim’s victim, withdraws, largely at the behest of his friend Fielding, even his demand for compensation of twenty thousand rupees for the personal and professional injuries suffered from the stain on his character and the time that he spent in prison. The trial scene and the courtroom in *A Passage to India*, define however, that immanent space, narrative and institution in which racial analysis and a historical critique and tradition of English/Indians, colonizer / colonized, larger world/limited world on which *A Passage to India* is premised. The threat to those premises is represented in the courtroom, exemplified briefly in the efforts of British attendees to assume a position. Out of the crowd and the platform, that

is rebutted by the presiding magistrate:

And the party, including Miss Quested, descended from its rash eminence. The news of their humiliation spread quickly, and people jeered outside. (211)

The world of colonial rule, it seemed, was being, ‘turned upside down’ not by a peasant insurrection but by the trial of its own making. The novel, like the English rule it represents must as soon as it has initiated the proceedings, brings the issue to its conclusion. Meanwhile, and most alarmingly, just as the Anglo-Indian community has been able to temporarily overcome its internal difference and consolidate itself in defence of what it saw as the aggrieved Miss Quested not elevated to a symbol of its pride of position, the Indian population too, both Hindu and Muslims, have collected and organized their efforts in defence of their own the accused Aziz. This organization itself, as Fielding warns his Indian acquaintances it would be, was necessarily construed by the English as an intolerable threat to their sovereignty.

To sum up then perceived or constructed racial differences were transformed into very real inequalities by colonialist and racist regimes and ideologies. Accordingly the analysis of race, culture and religion in the discussed novel must take cognizance of both the realities of racial discriminations and oppressions, as well as call attention to the contractedness of the concept itself.



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