

# E.M Forster's A Passage to India as a Postcolonial Novel

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**Abstract---** *The term 'Post Colonialism' refers to the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity in the modern era; mostly after many colonized countries got their independence from European powers. Dating back to the time of 16th century, the colonial and imperial encounter between the west and the non-west has led to historical, political and cultural ramifications often dictating a Eurocentric superiority on the natives who are perceived to be inferior, barbaric and uncivilized. In an attempt to dominate inferior people, the colonial ruler has often set to suppress their culture, tradition as well as tried to suppress them with their own language. These acts of suppression were resisted by natives in order to save their indigenous languages, cultures and lifestyles. In literature, writers present the era of Post Colonialism with common motifs and themes like 'identity', 'language' and 'racism'. Some remarkable works are Things Fall Apart, Midnight's Children, Disgrace, The English Patient and many more. In my research paper, I will explore the work The Passage to India written by E.M Forster. The novel is a realistic document about the British rule in India. This paper aims to analyze A Passage to India as a postcolonial, anti-imperialistic text and will also emphasize upon the psychological barriers and prejudices projected in the novel.*

**Keywords---** *Post Colonialism, Identity, Racism, Prejudice, Colonies, Domination.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism is said to be the response of the colonized to the colonial oppression as it covers the era where natives resisted and tried to save their indigenous languages, cultures and lifestyles. It was the political resistance to the authority of the colonizer who was considered to be the outsiders who tried to establish their domination by suppressing their culture, tradition as well as their language. It is a very important division of cultural studies for it examines the inequalities not only social but also the political one in order to bring about the structural justice.

The Post Colonialism Literature can be broadly divided into two approaches. The first one being anti-colonial driven by nationalist thinkers and philosophers who taught people to learn the mechanism to fight out the colonizer like Mahatma Gandhi and Frantz Fanon. The other approach, however concerns itself with the academic discourse in which the theoreticians 'write back' to the 'Empire' sometimes they offended the suppression and disliked the behavior of colonizers, sometimes they write to defend native cultures while other times glorifying the struggles done by natives to protect their identity. It seeks to address the ways in which non-European (Asian, Africa, South American, but also settler colony) Literatures and cultures have been marginalized as an effect of colonial rule.

The super imposition of the colonial authority along with its culture civilization have led to the social exclusion and denigration of the native systems, cultures and civilization and the opposition by native people. The perfect

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example of cultural domination would be the role of English in India. Colonial administrators such as Warren Hastings and T.B. Macaulay along with other academic scholars like William Jones first studied Indian languages, then they successfully translated important Indian texts in their 'superior' language. Later on they announced that all Indian text are worthless and claimed that India could never be developed with their primitive culture. According to them, English and European culture ensure liberty, development and modernization.

Some of the most prominent writers of Post Colonial Literatures are Chinua Acheba, Franz Fanon, Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, Li-Young Li, Derek Walcott, Gayatri Chakravorty etc. Though all these writers belong to different nations, different lands, different languages and cultures, they all have produced wonderful works of literature of which many would certainly come under the label of Post Colonial literature. Their works seek to understand how oppression, resistance and adaptation had occurred during the colonial rule. It talks about the domination of colonial power and oppression utilized by the colonizers in their colonies. It is a literature of resistance, anger, protest and hope.

"Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies... from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization"(p.168)

E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1960) illustrates the story of imperialism and brings out the difference between British and Indians. He realistically explores the emergence of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperial rule. We cannot deny the fact that how amazingly Forster narrates the whole scenario with ease. His novel is generally well received and viewed in positive light and was admired by readers and critics. A semi-anonymous Indian wrote in 1928 named A.S.B "for the first time I saw myself reflected in the mind of an English author, without losing all semblance of a human face". It is a realistic document which deals with the racial conflict between the orient and occident.

## **II. THE BRITISH IMPERIALISM**

India was one of the most valuable and populous of all colonies of Britain; it was recognized by British as the 'jewel of the crown'. The British came to India with the strong motive or with high hopes to use Indian resources for their own profit. E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* explores the relationship between English Empire and Indians. The novel can be read from the perspective of a Colonial writer who from the very beginning reveals Indians as inferior. He writes:

"..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 through a few fine exists they are hidden away in gardens whose filth deters all [...] Chandrapore was never large or beautiful..."(APTI, 9).

Forster describes Chandrapore as dirty, formless and seemingly made of mud. Then he compares the place where Britishers lived and it was literally elevated above the Indian town "Houses belong to Eurasians stand on the high ground...". The Westerners never showed respect towards the Orientals as they felt Natives to be uncultured and barbaric. When Adela asks to see real India, Ronny laughed about her interest, he claimed how foolish Adela is

"Ronny was in high spirits. The request stuck him as comic", he said how an English person whose country had

Colonized India, is impatient from visiting it. Ronny was of view that he and other Anglo- Indians were better than natives, as if natives were not humans. Ronny got angered whenever he saw his mother talking to natives. "Oh. Good gracious! Why ever did not you tell me you had been talking to a native?" (31).

Ronny with a colonial mindset finds the natives as sick and backward and shows it from time to time. He claims that India is a like a baby who needs someone to look after it and we the Britain are nurturing India like a son. He exclaims that India has no capacity for self-government which often leads to infertility and immaturity.

Forster not only target Indians but also India's culture and traditional environment. He mentions: 'April, herald of horrors, is at hand. The sun was returning to his kingdom with power but without beauty-that was the sinister feature'(111-2). For Britishers, Indians were not even humans; they were presented as dirty, ugly, and inferior with no self-respect. He points out "The train had come in and crowd of dependents were swarming over the seats of the carriage like monkeys"(128).

The novel is replete with instances of Racism and Prejudice. For an instance when Aziz met with Mrs. Moore in the mosque, she invited him to Club. But Aziz knew that entries of Indians were prohibited into Chandrapore club even as guest. Mrs. Callendar's comment highlights the racial prejudice against Indians: 'He (the native) can go where he likes as long as he does not come near me. They give me the creeps '(28). It was racism of the 'colonizer' over 'colonized' as well as domination of Britishers over natives.

### III. EAST-WEST CONFLICT

A Passage to India not only tells about the cruelty and snobbery of British Empire but also highlights the pettiness of the Indians. The British Empire in India is the most striking example in the history of the World of the domination on a vast territory by a minority alien race. Forster brilliantly presents the strained relationship between the colonizers and colonized. Forster gracefully throws light on how inhumanly British treat Indians and had a corruptive attitude towards Indians. For an instance, we see in the novel that Britishers always considered Indians as inferior as well as ignorant characters. The scene of Bridge party was highlighted for the discussion of the racial conflict depicted in the novel. The party was an evidence of prejudices where natives were portrayed as inferiors as they stand timidly in a corner of a lawn and were seen as inferior. The party was set up to "bridge" the gap between the British and the Indians. However, this gesture appears to be quite empty because Mrs. Turton and Ronny disdainfully discuss how shabby Indians were dressed up. Mrs. Turton mockingly chided Indian Women by calling them crude. Forster successfully presents the racial prejudices, inferiority/superiority complex in this episode.

The English officers in the novel think themselves as civilized and superior, they never cared about natives; they didn't try to enter in the heart of their subjects. There have been always conflicts between East and West as both have different culture and both misunderstood each other. People of both the communities didn't have faith in each other.

There are many evidences of misunderstanding between colonizers and colonized in novel A Passage to India. Miss Adela Quested came from England with desires to explore Ancient India, as she said "I want to see real India"(22).She was a good human being, she sympathized with Indians as well but she possessed a misconception

about native Indians particularly about Muslims that they had loose character and all were selfish with cunning minds. She was of a view that they possessed many wives. She was curious to see ancient India for this; she along with Mrs. Moore and Aziz went to Marabar Cave. There she asked Dr. Aziz, how many wives he has? Aziz replied one, in my own particular case. He understood that English people will consider Natives cruel. He perceives that they have delusion about Indian people, they think Indians are neither good human being nor trustworthy. The incidence of Marabar caves proves the insensitivity of Britishers towards Indians. The cave was quiet and dead, it represents an ancient, inhuman void, the more terrifying aspect of the universal oneness embraced by Hinduism. When Adela was roaming there in the cave she feels something unusual about it as it seems almost alien and malicious and quiet unfriendly to humans and that make her unconscious and she accused Aziz for molesting her. She blamed him for the attempt of sexual assault. That charge was a turning point in life of Aziz as well as his behavior towards Britishers. This makes him believe that English were insensitive towards natives.

#### **IV. SCOPE OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

Forster represents himself in the form of Fielding as he is the only character in the novel that has strong and friendly relations with Indians. Unlike the other English people he does not recognize the racial distinctions between himself and the native population. He was able to fulfill the gap between English and Indians as he considered Indians as group of individuals with whom one can connect through mutual respect, courtesy and intelligence. Forster was of view that British rule in India could only be successful when Britishers start treating Indian fellows with respect and courtesy like Fielding does.

Forster's India is hostile to Britishers and attacks its colonizer as they were struggling and wanted to force them to leave. Despite the British attempts to 'tame India but it remains a 'Wild' Country. Forster says:

"How can the mind take hold of such a Country? Generations of invaders had 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".(p.149).

Dr. Aziz was scornful of the English people and ignores them completely, because he was not in favor of their superiority over Indians. He does not feel great about the English woman or man or even about the culture of England. He only feels connected with Mrs. Moore when they first meet at mosque. Aziz looked whether Mrs. Moore was barefooted or was covering her head during prayer in Mosque and he found she was following all the rituals and that time only he becomes fond of her and connects with her strongly. The incidence of Mosque opens him to the possibility of friendship with Fielding. He strongly felt connected with Mrs. Moore and Fielding as the English woman treats him like his own son. Fielding and Aziz presents a positive model of liberal humanism.

On the other hand, at some point we have seen Fielding tries to insist Aziz by saying that India is not an Indian property. He claims that "it's nobody's India".(273). He trying to convince Aziz and makes him believe that India has least chances of becoming Independent. He jeers:



“Who do you want instead of the English? Japanese? He explains that British are better rulers than any other Colonial power; he claims that they understand Indians better. Furthermore, he realizes that it is difficult for India to be a Nation because of its diversity. He tries to undermine any possibility of India ever becoming an Independent Nation. All these arguments frustrate Aziz and he says “India shall be a nation!” No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Muslims and Sikh and all shall be one!...India a nation! What an apotheosis? Fielding mocked again and Aziz cried down yes we hate each other but we hate you the most. He said if he was unable to make them out of country Ahmed will, Karim will, he says if it’s fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you and claims “you and I shall be friends” (p.274-275)

With each possible way Fielding tried to convince Aziz that India will never become a United Nation. Fielding and Forster denounce colonization yet they simultaneously gain privilege from it, and it highlights their attitudes towards colonization. However, both characters have great fondness for each other. For instance, when Aziz was arrested for the charge being imposed by Adela for assaulting her in the Cave, the British authority believed that he was guilty but Fielding was the one who stands for Aziz as he believed that Aziz was innocent. There was a meeting in the club where Fielding stands alone against his countrymen by stating his belief that his friend is innocent. But later on finally Adela tells the court she has made a mistake and Dr. Aziz never followed her into the cave. Aziz was released without one stain on his character.

At the end of the novel they meet again and discussed about politics as well about their life especially what happened two years back and were laughing to their old relationship. Aziz points out that one day India shall finally get rid of the English. Then, Aziz tells Fielding, “You and I shall be friends” (p.368)

## V. CONCLUSION

A Passage to India is a novel that simply or clearly states that friendship cannot be maintained between English and the Indians. The novelist represents the complex problems involved in befriending the colonized while simultaneously being one of his oppressors. His work is the most sensational work of Post Colonial Literature as it not only states the brutality of Britishers over Indians but also tells about the psychology of Indians towards Britishers. The novel A Passage to India is based on the assumptions and principles of the postcolonial critical theory. Novelist shows the ‘colonialist’ ideology with superiority, and the ‘Orientals’ always with marginalization and stereotypes with the ‘Westerns’ had constructed about Indians to contain them.

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