

COLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WRITINGS OF E. M. FORSTER

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Abstract— The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the end of colonial domination of a large part of the world by imperial powers. With the change in the geo political situation the intellectual focus was turned towards the manner in which the cultures of the suppressed nations had been subverted by the colonizers. Around 1960s literature came to be seen as a privileged site for understanding social structures, cultural codes and inter ethnic understanding and misunderstanding. This paper is an attempt by focusing on the process of rewriting the Fiction of E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*. The writer uses his work not only to reject the period's prevailing values of life and art, but also to assert his difference and re-appropriates this rebellious tone to criticise the Western mind.

Index Terms— imperial, well worn, exposition, power, resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION (*HEADING 1*)

Edward Morgan Forster was born on January 1, 1879, London. He died on June 7, 1970, at Coventry, Warwickshire. Forster's father Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster, an architect, died when the son was a baby, and he was brought up by his mother and paternal aunts. Both his parents died in his childhood leaving him with a legacy of 8000 Pounds. This money helped him in his livelihood and enabled him to follow his ambition of becoming a writer. His schooling was done at Ton bridge School in Kent where the theater got named after him. He attended Cambridge University where his intellect was well groomed and he was exposed to the Mediterranean culture which was much freer in comparison to the more unbending English way of life. After graduating he started his career as a writer; his novels being about the varying social circumstances of that time. He was a British novelist, essayist, and social and literary critic. In 1953 he was awarded the Order of Companions of Honor and in 1969 given Queen Elizabeth's Order of Merit.

In his first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) he showed his concern that people needed to stay in close contact with their roots. Lilia Herriton flees repressive Edwardian England to Italy. Lilia is the widow of Charles Herriton, and since Charles's death has been living with his family in the village of Sawston. Her mother-in-law, Mrs. Herriton, and her two children, Philip and Harriet, have supervised Lilia closely to assure that she does not do anything to disgrace the family, but have decided to allow her Italian journey in the hope that

the experience will help to civilize her. But soon after her arrival in Italy, Lilia falls in love with Gino, the son of an Italian dentist, marries him and settles down with him in Monteriano. Lilia's marriage to Gino sparks the main action of the novel. The young widow hopes to find in Italy and marriage a freedom that she has been denied to in Sawston, but she is disappointed. Gino proves bad as a husband; incapable of offering his wife the kind of freedom she wishes. Left to herself in the little provincial Italian town, Lilia feels more miserable than she has ever been in Sawston. Gino asserts an Italian husband's authority on her, accompanied with blind and terrible anger. Lilia dies on child -birth, and the English family at Sawston plans rescue of the infant from his father's hand. Three persons are summoned to the job: Philip, the younger, clever, surviving Herriton son, his sister, Harriet, and Caroline Abbott. Direct bribery and persuasion having failed, an attempt is made to kidnap the baby who is killed during the attempt accidentally in a horrible incident. The novel ends with the return of the English party to England in a new spirit and consideration of matters.

In *The Longest Journey* (1907) he suggested that cultivation of either in isolation is not enough, reliance on the earth alone leading to a genial brutishness and exaggerated development of imagination undermining the individual's sense of reality. Rickie Elliot, a man who aspires to be a writer, much like Forster himself, whose lack of success and bevy of self-doubts drives him into a largely loveless marriage and a career circumscribed by a dry sense of duty. Rickie, has a small inheritance from his parents, but his writing career is not going the way he hoped it would as no publishers are interested in his work.

Stuart Ansell meets Stephen, Rickie's half-brother, and immediately takes a liking to him. After Stuart learns of his connection to Rickie, he takes Stephen and confronts him. Stuart tells Rickie that Stephen is not his father's illegitimate son, but his mother's. This news sends Rickie reeling. He realizes how foolish he's been – with his marriage, his professional life, his treatment of his brother – and he vows to change. To this effect, he agrees to accompany Stephen back to his aunt's house. The two bonds and Rickie find himself enjoying life again for the first time in years. He feels his artistic impulses returning, his creative vision sharpening. But unfortunately for Rickie, he doesn't live long enough to put this into practice. Stephen, who it turns out, is a bit of an alcoholic,

passes out drunk one night on some train tracks. When Rickie struggles to drag him to safety, he is killed by an oncoming train. Stephen survives and, riddled with guilt, carries on his brother's legacy. He champions his brother's writing, and the novel ends with Rickie finally achieving the recognition, albeit posthumously, that his artistic brilliance deserved.

He also wrote a comic novel named *A Room with a View* in 1908. This was the most optimistic of all his novels and was also made into a film in 1985.

Lucy Honeychurch and Miss Bartlett complaining that they did not get the rooms with views they had been promised in the Pension Bertolini, an inn in Florence, Italy. "The rooms the Signora promised us in her letter would have looked over the Arno" (23). The disappointed Charlotte and Lucy then go downstairs for dinner to receive an unexpected offer: the Emersons, who are socially not equal to them, have a room with a view and offer to exchange rooms. The novel is about whether to accept or not to accept this offer, and all the social, aesthetic and personal concerns of the characters converge on this dilemma. The central theme of *A Room with a View* is the tension between beauty and delicacy, between honesty and propriety. It also delves into the theme of learning and growth, leading to self knowledge and spiritual fulfillment of the individual- the contract of Art with life being a natural correlative to the theme of self realization.

Howards End (1910) which is a motivating story about two sisters Margaret and Helen who live in a house called Howards End. Margaret marries Henry Wilcox, a businessman and brings him back to Howards End. *Howards End* was the first successful novel by Forster. It deals with personal relationships and conflicting values. The Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen, and their brother Tibby, who care about civilized living, music, literature, and conversation with their friends; on the other, the Wilcoxes, Henry and his children Charles, Paul, and Evie, who are concerned with the business side of life and distrust emotions and imagination. Here, Forster makes a concerted effort to promote the perception of a higher realm of spirituality. The predominant symbol for the transcendental experience becomes the house – to this Forster links all prominent symbols, characters and associative theme.

In *Howards End* (1910) novel in the portrait of the Wilcoxes, active in the Imperial and West African Rubber Company. Forster exposed the stunned sensibility of the colonial ruling classes.

A Passage to India (1924) explore in the context of England's decline as a colonial power. A secular humanist throughout his life, Forster was gravely concerned about social, political, and spiritual divisions in the world. This novel confronts the readers with the triumph of the natural forces that rationalism of the Western philosophy claims to have controlled and ordered. They presented themselves in a negative form: against the vaster scale of India, in which the earth itself seems alien, a resolution between it and the imagination could appear as almost impossible to achieve. His purpose in this novel is to make the East and the West come together.

The last novel *Maurice* (1971) is a powerful condemnation of the repressive attitude of the British society, as well as a plea for emotional and sexual honesty. Here, Forster projects society which is inimical to the needs of the individual. In this novel the dominant theme is a relationship which is considered anathema. Forster lends creative legality to his theme by linking it to both the human and the primal forces of nature. This supplies to the novel the symbolic mode and structure within which the hero progresses on his voyage of knowledge and self- discovery. This novel was written between 1913 and 1914, tells the story of Maurice Hall, and his struggles to come to terms with his homosexuality. Forster had shown the book to friends throughout his lifetime but deemed it unpublished. According to David Leavitt, Maurice Forster had many reasons for not revealing his script, the main one was the public view on homosexuality and since Maurice did not end in the way that other contemporary homosexual novels used to end "with one lad dangling from a noose or with a suicide pact" (xii) Maurice would have made Forster very vulnerable in the England of 1914 (xii). Forster himself was a popular author but his readers did not know that he was homosexual and he was afraid of the critical reaction that he feared a publication of *Maurice* would bring.

Forster had two great loves in his life, one Egyptian and one Indian. The Indian, Syed Ross Masood, was a charismatic student in England when he was taught Latin by Forster; each took to the other and they continued to meet up for many years, both in England and India. They were so close that Forster came to believe that the relationship could be consummated. But when one evening Forster kissed him, Masood rejected him, pushing him away. Forster was both horribly embarrassed and deeply wounded. Later, his friend told him he had married, and Forster was plunged into depression. For all that, their friendship persisted and over 17 years they continued to meet and exchanged highly charged and affectionate letters.

Forster's second great love was an Egyptian, Mohammed el-Adl, a tram driver in Alexandria. Forster met him when he was sent to Egypt in the role of "searcher", where his task was to interview the war-wounded in hospital to see if they knew anything of the fates of those who were unaccounted for. Mohammed's caresses and natural warmth did wonders for Forster. Their relationship lasted many years, despite the risks and the very obvious disparity in their backgrounds and despite the fact that Mohammed, too, went on to marry and father a child. On his voyages to and from India, Forster always tried to meet up with Mohammed in Port Said and when Mohammed was ill and dying, Forster did everything he could to help him. Since Forster faced two kinds of alienation: self alienation and alienation from others.

Forster is considered as a humanist activist and an early-twentieth century writer, Forster models the relationships between colonisers and colonised in terms of European exploitation versus non-European victimisation. He recreates the experience of the coloniser in a different setting and recalls the perceptions of imperial subjugation and its aftermaths. Despite the fact that they are set in two different continents, the

works of Forster are considered as representatives of the colonial phenomena with the colonised and colonisers subjects. Forster could not help but feel the 'gulf' that separates him from the Indians. This paper reconsiders the colonial consciousness in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). It tells the story of imperialism in India and through his narrative Forster brings out the cultural differences between the Britishers and Indians.

Forster wrote six novels the simple fact that five out of six novels by him have been put into films and won world-wide recognition. Forster has always been an elusive figure in the history of literary criticism. "The Elusive Forster" is the title of John Beer's (1979) introduction to a collection of essays on his centenary, which shows that one hundred years after his birth, he is still a difficult writer to cope with. He is always counted as a member of Bloomsbury, but he was "on the periphery rather than at the heart of this circle". Woolf's famous commentary on him, even for his contemporaries, Forster appeared to be made up of many aspects that are not comfortably reconcilable:

. . . we have the sense that there is some perversity in Mr Forster's endowment so that his gifts in their variety and number tend to trip each other up. If he were less scrupulous, less just, less sensitively aware of the different aspects of each case, he could, we feel, come down with greater force on one precise point. As it is, the strength of his blow is dissipated. He is like a light sleeper who is always being woken by something in the room. The poet is twitched away by the satirist; the comedian is tapped on the shoulder by the moralist; he never loses himself or forgets himself for long in sheer delight in the beauty or the interest of things as they are (1966).

Edward Said signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined. The West thus conceived of its superiority relative to the perceived lack of power, self consciousness, or ability to think and rule, of colonized peoples. Psychoanalysis, too, in particular as refracted by Lacan, has postulated that self identity is constituted within the gaze of another. Yet despite the occlusions, we should remain aware that the elusive presence of the other or subaltern does make itself felt in imperial writings.

A Passage to India is concerned with Aziz, a young Muslim doctor, whose enthusiasm for the Indian English friendship turns to bitterness when he is tried for molesting Adela Quested, an English woman, the fiancée of the city magistrate, Ronny Heaslop. Adela has come to India with Ronny's mother, Mrs. Moore. The humiliation suffered by Aziz during the trial turns him against the Britishers and his friendship with Mr. Fielding, the principal of Government College, also comes to end as the novel is concluded. Aziz's desire to be friends with the English i.e. his wish to get connected, fails and the root cause of this is the interracial differences.

Adela, being new to India, is enthusiastic about seeing "the real India" (1924 16). Her desire to see the real India makes her the centre of an amused group of English ladies, "One said,

wanting to see Indians! How new that sounds! Another, 'Natives, why fancy!'" (18)

All these comments on the Indian make him appear like some commodity. Underneath every opinion expressed about the Indian there is a sense of the racial superiority of Europeans. The writer portrayed as someone exotic as can be seen in the amused tone of the English women, "Wanting to see Indians! How new that sounds!" (1924 18)

The racial tension seen in many passages of the novel reaches its peak as the plot progresses. The expedition to the Marabar caves proves disastrous for Aziz, as he is accused of molesting Adela in the caves.

The Britishers are furious after the caves episode as is seen in the way the naked machinery of imperialism comes into action during the trial of Dr. Aziz. Adela who till then was not really friendly with her people, suddenly becomes everyone's favourite. She is the symbol of Empire being violated by a native and the Britishers are determined to teach a lesson to the natives.

The English do not approve of friendship with the Indian subjects as too much of mixing up with the natives suggested that the honour of the British Empire was at stake. After the caves incident Mr. Turton, the Collector, comments:

I have had twenty five years experience of this country... and during those twenty five years I have never known anything but disaster results when English people and Indian attempt to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes,. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy – never, never (1924 141).

In this novel Forster's attempt to understand the difference of India by way of a Western vocabulary of liberal tolerance has received much critical acclaim, not least in India itself. Throughout the narrative, Indian sophistication in spiritual matters shows up the so called superiority of Western intellect. But the novel ends on another admission of native opacity. India is constructed as a place of continual European bafflement. Forster tries to signify India, and to do so in conjunction with the West, as a mystifying - if also a self regulating – confusion opposed to the West control.

The ambivalences of *A Passage to India* stem from its unresolved critique of the individualistic humanism that was Forster's own system of belief. It was a system which acknowledged a common humanity with Indian's yet which offered him no satisfactory way of dealing with the larger antinomial conflict inherent to colonialism. An illustration of his own divided opinions on India, Forster in a 1944 essay agreed with the Victorian writer William Arnold that, 'Until the point of divergence between Eastern and Western mentality has been discovered, cooperation is impossible'. Forster's work itself, as Virginia Woolf once rightly remarked, makes up a 'contradictory assortment.' Suspended between the polarities of social naturalism and mystic symbolism. *A Passage to India* seeks to reject the apparently intractable opposition of hardening British over lordship pitted against increasingly more defensive Indian resistance. To do so it offers a liberal option: an 'aristocracy of the sensitive' in the form of homosocial bonding across the colonial divide. British political

dishonesty is to be condemned; India is chaotic; but individuals like Fielding and Aziz, are occasionally able to rise above the divisiveness to affirm human values.

However, Forster also recognized that during a period of crisis – such as after Adela's alleged rape the injunction only connect, could not be sustained. A much deeper structural integration was indeed, but was not for the time being imaginable. The dimensions of economic and political change lie beyond the range of *A Passage to India*. Though Indian anger at the time of the trial gives the impression that a new spirit seemed abroad, a rearrangement, British rule in the novel remains suspended in a continuous present. Aziz's later nationalism is a singular phenomenon, not connected to a wider movement. Clearly, though his interest in its obliquities is real, Forster could not yet release himself from an explanation of India as little more than an impenetrable muddle.

Adela Quested shocks everyone by saying that she was mistaken in accusing Dr. Aziz and eventually returns to England. Dr. Aziz is left feeling bitter toward all British, even his friend Fielding. Aziz leaves the area for the Hindu state, Mau. Two years after the trial, Fielding attempts to reconnect with Aziz in Mau. The men talk but are not able to cross their political and national differences. Mishra describes the changed men:

both Fielding and Aziz have 'hardened since Chandrapore'. Aziz's nationalism is more rhetorical than before. 'We may hate one another, but we hate you most.' Fielding, dulled by marriage and respectability, feels 'surprise at his past heroism. Would he today defy all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian?' The British Empire 'really can't be abolished because it is rude,' he thinks. 'Away from us,' he tells Aziz, 'Indians go to seed at once.' (23)

A Passage to India remains a historically important novel for its scathing exposition of social and ethical classification

under the Raj. It is in no way a straight forward criticism of the colonial Empire. For Forster's image of India was also exotic as that of the rest of the empire. However, despite his sympathy for Indians, it is curious to note that Forster is not really interested in granting freedom to India. Instead he points out the benefits of the British Rule such as the rule of law, introduction of modern education etc. Forster novel present India from a White man's perspective.

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