

The Oriental Mirror of E. M. Forster in ‘A Passage to India’

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The novel, *A Passage to India* had been authored by British Novelist Edward Morgan Forster in 1924. The main theme of the text lies in day to day dealings between Indian and Britons. In addition to this main theme there are two conflicted image of India shown in the novel; one as it is in the eyes of its colonial masters and one as it comes in the obscure vision of Indians. India stays at the core of this novel. This paper tries to discuss the various images of India; as motherland in heart of natives, exotic land in lens of foreign tourists, the ruled land seen by officials of British empire, and a conflicting site for Hindu And Muslim ideologies with its diverse culture, tradition and biodiversity. Chandrapur acts as microcosm of whole India. When a native becomes disillusioned with the glamour of empire, after the realization of his own inferior status, the idea of 'swaraj' originates in his consciousness. In this paper also tries to highlight the paradoxical behavior in the writings of Forster. Although Forster criticizes colonial treatment of native subjects in India, in the same novel he himself has treated Indian characters in poor light. The text becomes a water tight text in oriental tradition reflecting sexism, racism in its narrative style.

Keywords- Orient, India, Raj, Third World, Native, swaraj

A passage to India, authored by British novelist Edward Morgan Forster, was published 23 year before independence, in 1924. This novel won the prestigious James Tait Memorial Prize in 1924. *A passage to India* is distinct in style and treatment from the other narratives written in pre independent India, which were mostly written by Indian authors. The outlook of omniscient narrator in this text is ambivalent. He criticizes the behavior and position of the British but his language defies his good intentions. This text is a feeble voice of Colonialism, incoherent echo of Indian independence but, a strong example of oriental text. Though, Edward Said popularized the term oriental in 1978 with his publication of *orientalism*. Narrative voice and British addresses natives as oriental. There were no Indians but natives of British Raj. With surface look *A passage to India* is applauded for criticizing the ways of British empire but with an inward look same novel is criticized for its oriental outlook for India. In this text, India comes as a place of Hindu and Muslim ideologies, of diverse culture, tradition and biodiversity. The setting of this novel is Chandrapur which acts as microcosm of whole India. As echoed by its name India is

core, mantle and crust of this novel in its setting, content and thoughts. For the author, India is a hot country in eastern part of globe which is a mysterious, spiritual, exotic piece of land with a lot of diversity but without any distinction and proper identity.

Edward said says in *orientalism* ,

“Every writer on the orient assumes some oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the orient, to which he refers and on to which he relies...”

Forster had made his first visit to India in 1912, his experience of the ancient city of Ujjain feed his mind with blurry impression of India.

“ There was no place for anything and nothing was in its place. There was no time either. One confusion prevailed Ujjain and all things. Why differentiate? I asked the driver what kind of trees those were, and he answered trees; what was the name of birds, birds.....”

This observation of Forster gets its manifestation in the character of Mrs. Moore. She is made to reflect on the lack of self in Indian attributes. Seeing a wasp in India and not being able to identify it, she makes a conclusion that no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Animals, human beings and nature merge together as forest in eternal growth. The relation between the outside and inside is not defined in this country.

Communication between Empire and Colony

The main theme of this novel deals with scope of friendship between east and west, between the orient and occident, between the natives and British fellows. In the beginning of this novel, the Indian characters are shown discussing whether it is possible to be friends with Englishmen or no. They reaches to a generalized conclusion that when a British is new in India, he acts nice but he is hardened and callous after a year or so. Ronny Heaslop the district judge talks to her mother Mrs. Moore that India was not a drawing room and they were not there to be pleasing to natives. In their informal conversation they use the term niggers for natives and publicly treat them without respect. British interpret Indian mores and customs for the priveledge of holding domination over Indian land. Edward said also comments on this attitude of west that the European gained knowledge about orients and used it to maintain power over them. At one place, Adela accuses Ronny for his God like sentiments. He gives the answer,

“India like Gods, and Englishmen posing as Gods”

In words of Edward said, the orient is watched, since its almost offensive behavior issues outa reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European , whose sensibility tours the orient , is a watcher, a never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of strange manner of the orient. None of the Indian characters are strong in behavior; they are acted upon by the agents of empire. They are not individualized but are merely caricatures. Aziz tries to escape from being imprisoned in cowardice manner ; Mr. Haq is sentimental and fails to defend the case of Aziz. In universal sense, these are human weaknesses but in context of this novel their weakness is attributed to their Indianness. Forster does not leave any hope regarding friendship

between two races as a native is 'other' for a European and this other is irrational, queer and morally pervert. Characters of Cyril Fielding and Mrs. Moore, comes like moderator of imperialism. They become the voice of Colonial humanism but they are not able to think about an India without empire. They were believer of white men's burden. Mahatma Gandhi had aptly used the term 'historically imbalanced' for the eastern discourse to western readers. In addition to this unjust relationship between colonized and colonizer, the representation of India leads to the relationship between Hinduism and Islam, one is shown at discomfort with the next religion.

Symbolic, geographical and cultural biases

"The sky settles everything.... Not only climates but when the earth shall be beautiful.....by herself she can do very little..... Only feeble outbursts of flowers. Only in the south where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is endlessly ruptured. These fists and fingers are Marabar Hills".

The oriental styled description is not limited to characters only but it also results in the description of Indian landscapes and vegetation. In the narration of first chapter two eminent symbols earth and sky are reflected representation of east and west. Earth is described inferior to sky. Earth or east is feminine but sky is masculine and rational. Owing to this symbolic representation Fielding later remarks that British were in India for her own good. Omniscient narrator speaks,

The face of India presented in this novel is a Britishmen's India which is a basic construct of orientalism. Forster shows a pattern for making a mockery out of the cultural and social nuances of the 'other' who are Indian in this text. The first and last image of India coming in reader's mind with regard to this text is that India is incomprehensible, mystery and muddle. Marabar caves is the place where colonial and colonized force comes in conflict in This crucial episode comes in second part of the novel 'caves'. In the confusing episode at Marabar caves the illusion of friendship between an Indian and a British is shattered. The incident during Marabar trips decide the whole course of story but what exactly happened in caves remain unexplained forever. In the last section temples, there is a celebration of Lord Krishna's birthday in Mau but the whole depiction of this festival is worded in chaos and the lines seem puzzling to an Indian reader too.

Forster presents the aesthetics of Indian and western architecture as indicative of personal differences between the character of East and West. In India architecture is confused and formless and structures appear unfinished and drab while western architecture is honored in form and proportion. This comparison is presented in details of Marabar caves and Field's stop at Venice. Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore were fascinated by exotic image of India but local Englishmen hold the opinion that there was nothing but weather in India. Mr. Macbryde, who was superintendent of police in Chandrapure held a scientific theory about character of natives.

"All unfortunate natives are criminal at heart, for the simple reason that they live at south of latitude 30"

Women in colonial India

In words of Hans Bertin, universal images of the third world woman images construct from adding the third world difference to sexual differences which are predicted assumptions to portray the first world woman in better eye....oriental woman never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, history. He who is Forster in case of this novel spoke for and represented her. Women in pre independent India were not emancipated, their life was limited to purdah and domesticity. Aziz's aunt is shown in colors of patriarchy who thinks that getting married and begetting children were the only duties of women. Indian women do not come as characters but come as an element merged in the socio cultural canvas of India. Contrary to this the western women presented in text like Adela and Mrs. Moore control choices of their life. When Aziz goes under introspection after Marabar caves, in his poems he envisages women without Purdah.

Conclusion

Karl Marx had said, "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." The novel got published in 1924 after first revolution of independence had been fought in 1857 and civil movements of Mahatma Gandhi were invoking the soul of India. Still the text does not give a slight hint to these past events. There is no talk of economic exploitation of natives by policies of British imperialism.

In his swaraj theory, Aurobindo propounds that chief intention of British empire was to create some English minded Babus, so that being obsessed with foreign education, they became fully obedient to British government. But, this approach did not follow the expectation, common educated Indian start to realize their lack of political liberty and societal inequality under British rule. Though the discourse of Swaraj has very little space in 'A passage to India' yet it appears there, obscure yet inspiring. After the trial and acquittal of Aziz, the tension between Hindu and Muslim moves towards a different tangent. Mr. Das requests Aziz to write a poem for his magazine with wide readership among Hindus. Aziz keeps his doubt to him, Mr. Das replies that the magazine is for all general Indian. Aziz says that there is no such person in existence as the general Indian.

Das says, "There may be when you write a poem."

In the imagination of natives reflect an ambiguous picture of swaraj which stands in contrast with British Raj. Edward said describes this concept as an 'Imaginative Geography' which inspires natives; to move into desired state of independence. Nawab Bahadur gives up his title to protest against the mistreatment of Aziz by British officials. Professor Godbole leaves his job to open his own school in home town Mau. These small individual stances were inclined towards aim of self government.

Though in last phase of the novel again Aziz comes on friendly term with Fielding but his tone is political in tone. Indicating towards the possibility of Second world war, Aziz opines that India will not stay with Britain in next war. Fielding asks him if he considers French to be better

colonial masters. Thinking yet lost Aziz replies that will be decided by conference of oriental statesman. Omnipresent third person narrator says,

“Aziz imagines India as a motherland. In his personal moments he thinks that not until she is a nation, her sons be treated with love and respect. “

Shashi tharoor says that western dictionaries define secularism as absence of religion but Indian secularism does not mean irreligiosness but profusion of religions. Indians are comfortable with religious diversity around them. Adela praises Akbar for his propounded religion ‘ Deen E elihai’ which was open and equal to all . Aziz says,

“you keep your religion , I mine. That is the best nothing embraces the whole India nothing, nothing, nothing”

Adela as a thoughtful and curious seeker of India opines that something should be universal to this country. What it can be except the bond of nationalism? By the time this novel got published, nationalism was at its peak growth in India. The nation still colonized had witnessed the revolt of 1857, civil disobedience movement and other such revolts. As the novel A passage to India is shrouded in an oriental light, these events are not hinted upon by the pen of Edward Morgan Forster.

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