Research Ethics: Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
Vol. 1, Issue 5, Nov.- Dec 2023
www.researchethics.in

India Through the Eyes of Post-Colonial Literature by Non-Indigenous Author: A Study of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

Mehvish Nawreen[1], Dr. Irshad Ahmad Itoo[2]

[1]PhD Scholar, Chandigarh University, India, Email: mehvishnawreen@gmail.com
[2]Associate Professor, Department of English, Chandigarh University, Email: irshad.e12842@cumail.in

Abstract

This research paper takes a close look at E.M. Forster's book, "A Passage to India." It focuses on how India is portrayed in the story, especially since Forster, the author, is not from India. The novel is set in the time when India was under British rule, and it talks about the complex relationships between different cultures, the power struggles, and the political situation during that time. The study fits into the category of post-colonial literature, which means it looks at how literature deals with the aftermath of colonialism. The goal is to understand how Forster represents India and to question whether he genuinely tries to understand the mix of cultures or if he accidentally shows biases from the colonial era. This is especially interesting because Forster is not from India, so it explores how an outsider represents a colonized society. The research goes into the details of the book, examining specific parts to figure out the themes and symbols Forster uses to create the image of India. It looks at who has power in the story, giving attention to the native characters and whether their perspectives are highlighted or overlooked. The study also looks at how Forster deals with topics like identity, belonging, and the clash between Eastern and Western ways of thinking. The aim is to contribute to the larger discussion about post-colonial literature by giving us a better understanding of the challenges and possibilities when an author from a colonizing culture tries to tell the story of a colonized society. Overall, it encourages us to think more critically about how colonial history continues to influence the way we tell stories about places like India.

Keywords: Post-colonial literature, colonizer, colonized, E.M. Forster, India, cultural representation, identity, power dynamics.

Post-colonialism is about what happens after a country has been under the control of a more powerful one. It is about the struggle for independence and finding their own way of doing things. In post-colonial literature, which can be in the form of novels, poems, short stories, and more, we often find discussions about cultural identity. These writings may talk about the changes that have occurred or question the current situation.

Some experts like Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their book "The Empire Writes Back" point out three common things in post-colonial literature. First, they talk about how the voices of the post-colonial people were ignored and pushed to the side by the powerful colonial countries. Second, they mention how this literature challenges the colonial mindset within the text itself. Lastly, they discuss how post-colonial literature often uses the language and culture of the powerful countries to tell its own stories.

So, post-colonial literature covers everything affected by the colonial process from when colonization started to the present day. Post-colonial literature often deals with a fundamental question: should we try to go back to our original culture, follow the culture imposed by the colonizers, or create a new culture that combines both? If a novel explores and answers any of these questions, it can be seen as post-colonial literature. To figure out if a piece of writing is post-colonial, it is important to see if the former colony is truly independent or if it still relies on its former colonizer. Edward Said's book "Orientalism" is seen as the starting point for post-colonial studies. In this book, the author looks at how European countries justified colonialism by claiming their own racial superiority.

E.M. Forster's final novel, "A Passage to India," is widely regarded as his most brilliant and valuable work of art. It gained instant recognition and high praise when it was published in 1924 for its portrayal of British-Indian relations during the British rule in India. The novel explores the racial tensions between British colonizers and the Indian people of that time, while also exploring broader questions about human relationships.

Some critics have questioned the novel's credibility, suggesting that it portrays British officials as excessively cruel and depicts the relationships between the British and Indians unrealistically. However, most of the criticism has centered on its political aspects. Forster, despite addressing the negative impact of British imperialism in India and its

erosion of personal relationships, did not primarily intend the novel to be a political statement. Instead, he used the story to express his skepticism about British rule in India and its effect on personal connections among individuals. In this novel his focus is like his previous work "Howards End." He is interested in the idea of "connection," bridging gaps between different social and racial groups, and bringing together people from the East and the West who meet in India. For Forster, personal relationships are incredibly important, and he believes they lead to tolerance, good temper, and sympathy. He is influenced by G.E. Moore's ideas about the goodness of human nature and our natural desire for personal connections. However, in "A Passage to India," even though the characters like Dr. Aziz and Dr. Fielding long for connection, it is not always enough to overcome the racial tensions and misunderstandings they face. The novel is divided into three parts: "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple." These divisions reflect the growing conflict between Anglo-Indians and the Indian people due to misunderstandings and differences in terms of race, culture, and religion. Some see this division as representing a theme of separation and the desire for unity, akin to a philosophical idea by Hegel.

In the second chapter of the novel, there is a conversation among Indian characters like Dr. Aziz, Mahmoud Ali, and Hamidullah. They are discussing whether it is possible to be friends with an Englishman, and their conclusion is that it is not possible. This conversation sets the tone for the story because it shows that Forster's characters struggle to connect with English people and bridge the gap between their cultures. It is interesting to think about whether this difficulty in making connections could also be because Forster himself could not fully break free from the colonial ideas of his time. He was, after all, an Englishman writing about India, which means he was influenced by the colonial perspective. Edward Said's work on Orientalism argues that this perspective involves simplifying and stereotyping the 'orient' (in this case, India) from a Western viewpoint that assumes Western values are universal. Forster changes how these values are used in the colonial context, but he does not fundamentally challenge those values.

We can observe that the Indians have personal grievances against the British rulers. Hamidullah, for instance, feels insulted by the city magistrate when he is in court. Aziz is frustrated with his boss, the civil surgeon, who not only acts arrogantly but also seems to take pleasure in causing him trouble. Aziz also finds the behaviour of the civil surgeon's wife lacking in grace. One evening, when Aziz is at Hamidullah's house for dinner, he receives a message through a messenger that he is needed by the civil surgeon, Mr. Callendar. Aziz gets annoyed because he believes that the civil surgeon has called him on purpose to disrupt his dinner. Nevertheless, since he works at Minto Hospital under Mr. Callendar, he must go to meet him. In a rush, Aziz arrives at the civil surgeon's

residence only to find out that the civil surgeon is not there, which further irritates him. Aziz, as depicted by Forster, embodies these universal values and meets the expectations of the perceived reader.

It is ironic that Aziz used to play polo, a sport associated with the British. While Forster challenges the biases that the subaltern (lower-ranking British officials in India) holds against Indians, he does not challenge the underlying values that these biases are based on. This idea of Indians imitating British culture widens the gap between these two cultures instead of bridging it, as it intends to do. The meeting between Aziz and Mrs. Moore, who is the mother of Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate, is a crucial moment in the story. They meet at a mosque, a symbol of Islam, which represents a way of life that is both beautiful and enduring. Aziz suddenly sees an Englishwoman entering the mosque and calls out to her to stop and remove her shoes. The lady tells him that she has already removed her shoes, and they engage in a conversation to get to know each other.

This encounter between the Indian doctor and the Englishwoman visiting her son, Ronny, is the first significant event in the story. Miss Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore have come to India to experience "the real India." However, newcomers to India often have a limited view of what the real India is like. Adela Quested claims she wants to see the "real India" and is uninterested in the superficial English social events and tourist attractions. But it becomes clear that Adela's perception of India is also narrow in its own way. The collector, Mr. Turton, plans to host a Bridge Party at his home so that Miss Quested can meet some Indian residents of the city. Mr. Turton sends out invitations to several Indian gentlemen and ladies to attend the party. The Indians get quite excited about this and mistakenly believe that the invitations were sent on the orders of the Lieutenant-Governor. The Nawab Bahadur accepts the invitation saying:

> I can be a thorn in Mr. Turton's flesh and if he
> asks me I accept the invitation (p-36).

Nawab Bahadur's words are polite and show he trusts the Englishman. However, some Hindus, like Ram Chand, believe that going to the collector's party would make Nawab Bahadur look bad or lower his status. Aziz becomes a character people feel for because he does not let others see him as very different. The less he seems different, the more the novel sees him as a hero. When Indians try to act like the British, it makes the gap between their cultures bigger instead of bringing them closer. Aziz tries hard to be like the English, but when he tries to connect with Adela Quested like he did with Mrs.

Moore, it does not work out. His efforts to copy them end up making him seem like a funny imitation of himself.

Maybe Forster also acknowledges Rao's idea that sometimes you must express yourself in a language that is not your own. Aziz believes he showed his true self to Mrs. Moore, but when he tries to imitate others, it covers up who he really is under stereotypes about colonial India. His struggle to fit in, and eventually deciding not to, plays a complicated part in the structure of colonialism and oppression. In "A Passage to India," Aziz's efforts to act English create a barrier to genuine connections, and the English community rejects the idea of someone being both Anglo and Indian. The collector's party does not go well. Ronny believes that the important people do not attend such gatherings, and Mrs. Turton agrees. Ronny also thinks that most Indians have rebellious feelings, except for the farmers. The collector mentions that some of the men who came are hoping for favours from him. Mrs. Turton thinks English women are better than everyone in India except for a couple of the Ranis. Miss Quested tries to chat with some Indian women, but they do not have much to say to her.

> Please tell these Ladies that I wish we could
> speak their Language, but we have only just come
> to their country.' 'Perhaps we speak yours a
> little,' one of the ladies said, 'Why, fancy, she
> understands!" said Mrs. Turton Her manner
> had grown more distant since she had discovered
> that some of the group was westernized, and might
> apply her own standards to her (p-42)

An identity that's uncertain and conflicting challenges the power of the colonial system by questioning how people are seen. There's worry that if Indians succeed in this mixed Anglo-Indian role, it would disrupt the established hierarchy. This tension is clear at the tense garden party. Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested do not like how the white community acts distant toward the Indians. Adela believes the Indian guests were not treated well at the collector's party. Mrs. Moore thinks the English in India act as if they were superior beings. Everywhere we look, we see the divide between East and West, between those in power and those under it. Ronny does not support racial arrogance and superiority. The Civil Surgeon, Major Callender, goes a step further by hosting a party. However, he openly looks down on his assistant, Aziz, and does not acknowledge Aziz's surgical skill.

Fielding, who runs the local government college, really admires Adela and Mrs. Moore because they genuinely want to experience the "real India." Fielding, being an open-minded educator who believes in bringing Indians and English closer, invites them over for tea at his place. He also invites Professor Godbole and Mr. Aziz upon Adela's request. However, Adela feels let down because the English folks are not acting kindly. During the tea at Fielding's home, she has taken away by Mr. Heaslop, which makes her upset and furious, leading her to decide against marrying him. But then, an unexpected accident changes her mind. At Fielding's gathering, Aziz enthusiastically promises to take Mrs. Moore and Adela to see the Marabar caves, this distant and famous cave. They explore some parts that show the "real India" - an India that feels far-off, ancient, mysterious, like the Himalayas being covered by newer lands.

Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela Quested head to explore the Marabar caves together. During the journey, Adela cannot stop thinking about her marriage to Ronny. She imagines living at a hill station like other English women do during the summers and considers comforts, but she is not happy. Mrs. Moore is preoccupied with thoughts about Adela marrying her son Ronny. When they reach the caves, Aziz and the women start exploring. In the first cave, Mrs. Moore has a strange experience that feels like a hallucination, so she decides not to visit more caves. Now, Adela and Aziz are alone exploring the rest of the caves, but they hardly talk. Adela is lost in thoughts about Ronny and her marriage. She starts hallucinating too and feels like Aziz is behaving inappropriately. She leaves for Chandrapore with Miss Derek, who arrived with Fielding. Aziz returns to Chandrapore with Fielding and Mrs. Moore by train. Adela's behavior becomes a complete mystery, and nobody can explain what happened inside the cave. When Aziz gets back to Chandrapore's railway station, he gets arrested by Mr. Haq, the police inspector. Fielding talks about the strange and unsettling atmosphere that the whole situation brings to their interactions.

Forster's characters end up avoiding experiencing the true essence of "real India" and try to limit it to a pretty and idealized image. When Adela arrives at the Marabar caves, feeling emotionally worked up, she cannot keep this idea of "real India" under control anymore. Her senses get overwhelmed, causing her to give up her desire to see 'India' and instead feel scared of something menacing, as if she has been attacked by it. The main events in the novel, especially Adela accusing Aziz and Aziz's trial, highlight even more strongly how different the imperialists and the natives are, and how far apart the Eastern and Western cultures stand. Almost all the ruling class members, except Fielding and Mrs. Moore, firmly believe Aziz is guilty. The bureaucracy accepts Adela's accusation

without question. The collector sees this incident as proof of his belief that English and Indians should never mix socially.

MacBryde, the Police Superintendent, has his own belief that people living below latitude thirty degrees are inherently criminals. He strongly believes Aziz is guilty of the crime he is accused of. According to him, Englishmen in India should follow the history of the mutiny rather than the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. The Subaltern, another official, is very vocal and critical about Indians during a gathering at the club.

This whole process shows clearly how imperialism dehumanizes and affects everyone involved. The crisis caused by the 'attack' on Adela reveals the true nature of the small English community. What used to be an uncomfortable social act turns into cruel behaviour without any disguise. Social norms have fallen apart, and soon the moral values that should reflect 'European values' have crumbled too. This passage not only shows how easily the appearance of being civilized has shattered but also reveals how quickly the 'enlightened' values of the British rule have become corrupt. The trial of Aziz is not about justice anymore; it is about revenge and control, replacing the doctor's role as a healer with cruelty. Each character is pushed to stick to their own cultural groups. Even though Adela and Fielding tried to break away from the Anglo community's group mentality, the events surrounding the 'attack' pull them back in. For Adela, her encounter with the unfamiliar drives her to seek safety in what is familiar. For Fielding, his connection with Aziz brings pressure from the group, fostering an 'us versus them' mindset.

Similarly, Aziz, unable to break free from being seen as different, gives up trying to fit in and instead feels resentment and anger. This refusal makes it even harder for him to connect with others, especially Mrs. Moore's children. While he had a trusting connection with Mr. Moore, his relationship with her son is filled with distrust and doubt. He asks to Fielding:

> Then you are an oriental.' He unclasped as he spoke, with a little shudder. Those words- he had said them to Mrs. Moore in the Mosque at the beginning of the cycle, from which, after so much suffering, he had got free. Never be friends with the English! (p-306).

In the final pages of the novel, Aziz predicts that Fielding has replaced his search for personal connections with official duties. Their disagreement, even though it is approached with good humour, leads them both to reduce each other to simplified stereotypes. Fielding criticizes Aziz, saying, "Look at you, forgetting your medicine and going back to charms." The English women, led by Mrs. Turton, all share similar negative views about Indians. Mrs. Turton openly shows her disdain for them, believing they should bow down whenever they see an English woman. She thinks the English have been too lenient with the Indians, even shedding tears over Adela's sadness, something she has never done before. The Police Superintendent strongly supports the prosecution's case, and when Adela drops the charges against Aziz, Major Callender wants to end the trial on medical grounds. These Westerners' biases against Indians could not be more obvious. The trial demonstrates the clash between an individual and the government's system, as well as the prejudices of a foreign culture.

The response of Indians to Aziz's trial is significant. They all unite against the English to support Aziz, whom they believe is innocent. The Indian servants openly show their dislike for their English masters. The sweepers even go on strike. Nawab Bahadur offers to cover Aziz's legal expenses and would rather ruin himself than let an innocent Muslim suffer. Mrs. Turton admits to her husband that pretending the Indians do not hate them is ridiculous. College students demonstrate and mock the city Magistrate. After Aziz is acquitted, Nawab Bahadur gives up his title, and there's widespread chanting against English officials.

The divide between Indians and the English is evident. This becomes clear when the author comments on Adela's change of statement after the trial. The crucial moment is when Adela is asked to speak. The police superintendent had prepared her answers, but it seems her thoughts are influenced by something strange. When asked if Aziz followed her into the cave, she responds, "I am not quite sure." Pressed further, she admits, "I'm afraid I have made a mistake. Dr. Aziz never followed me into the cave." (p-223). The Magistrate asks Miss Quested if she wants to take back the accusation, and she replies, 'I take back everything.' The whole case falls apart. The Magistrate, exhausted from the trial, declares the prisoner innocent without any stain on his reputation. The Indians feel they have achieved a complete victory.

Forster explains that Adela's actions were based on 'cold justice and honesty.' When she withdrew the accusation, she did not feel any affection for the person she had accused. Indians believe that truth is not really truth unless it is accompanied by kindness and more kindness; and kindness again. They reject Adela's gesture because 'though it came

from her heart, it didn't include her heart.' India only gives her a few garlands in return. In simpler terms, even though a woman who was sympathetic to Indians and genuinely wanted to understand the real India, emotionally could not get closer to the Indian people even after she cleared the man she accused.

When Fielding wears Indian clothing, Forster comments that civilization in India "is found not in grand artworks or mighty deeds, but in the polite gestures of well-mannered Indians when they sit or move." These kinds of statements widen the gap between the East and the West.

Fielding is spending a lot of time with Miss Quested. She stays in his place, but he lives elsewhere. He thinks she is loyal and humble. Fielding blames her:

> The first time I saw, you were wanting to see
> India, not Indians... Indians know whether they
> are liked or not -they cannot be fooled here-—
> (p-253).

> He also comments:
> The British Empire rests on sand and
> Victory which would made the English
> sanctimonious, made them aggressive. They
> wanted to develop an offensive, and tried to do so
> by discovering new grievances and wrongs, many
> of which had no existence (p-253).

When Fielding tells Aziz he is headed to England briefly for work, Aziz privately believes Fielding's real reason is to marry Adela Quested. Aziz suspects Fielding is after Miss Quested's wealth and is convinced that she was previously romantically involved with Fielding during her time at the college. Forster's comment on the suspicious nature of the Indians is noteworthy:

> Suspicion in the oriental is a sort of malignant
> tumour, a mental malady, that makes him self-
> conscious and unfriendly, suddenly; he trusts and
> mistrusts at the same time in a way the westerner
> cannot comprehend. (p-272)

This statement highlights Dr Aziz's tendency to be suspicious, which is the main reason for the rift between the two close friends, Aziz and Fielding.

In this novel, the Indian men are shown as both soft and charming. The book talks about how the desires during colonial times were expressed between men, ranging from close friendships to subtle romantic feelings. After two years, Fielding comes to Mau for work, and Aziz, who works there as a doctor, isn't happy about it. He remembers how Fielding supported Miss Quested and believed in her side of the story during Aziz's compensation claim. Aziz thought Fielding had married Miss Quested but later learns, to his embarrassment, that Fielding married Stella, Mrs. Moore's daughter. Aziz had ignored Fielding's letters that explained everything, so he was mistaken all this time. However, Aziz is in no mood to resume his former relationship with Fielding and so he says to him:

> Please do not follow us whomever you marry.
> I wish no Englishman or Englishwoman
> to be my friend (p-288).

When Aziz realizes the truth about Fielding's marriage, he feels a bit ashamed of his suspicions. However, his distrust of Fielding does not fade much because the girl Fielding married is the sister of the City Magistrate, who Aziz considers an enemy. So, Aziz tells Fielding that he does not care who he married and asks not to bother him in Mau. He firmly declares that he does not want Fielding or anyone associated with him involved in his personal life, even saying it would be his dying wish. Yet, memories of Mrs. Moore bring him some comfort, as she had always been kind to him.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Hindus and Muslims is not portrayed as friendly. While they unite against the English during Aziz's trial, generally, they remain distant. There's mutual discomfort between them—Godbole's reminders of Hindu customs clash with Aziz's sensibilities, and there are negative stereotypes exchanged between their communities. Ronny, an Englishman, even believes that British rule prevents violence between Hindus and Muslims during annual riots. These differences between the two cultures seem insurmountable. Additionally, within Hindu communities, divisions exist, like the divide between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the state of Mau, where Muslims and English hold no significant influence. The novel's central message is the unbridgeable gap between the English and the Indians, rooted in their distinct cultures. Despite various instances highlighting this divide, the clearest declaration comes from

Aziz at the end. He firmly states that there can be no true friendship between the English and the Indians until India gains independence. It is significant because Aziz says this to someone he genuinely likes, despite not harbouring personal dislike towards him. His affection for Fielding, forgiveness of Adela, and respect for Mrs. Moore cannot overshadow his deep-seated hostility towards the English as a whole. Absolutely, conflict is indeed the central theme of "A Passage to India." The novel vividly portrays clashes on multiple levels: between the cultures of the East and West, the imperialists and natives, the human emotions and the bureaucratic systems of government, as well as the clashes among different classes, races, religions, and even individuals. This collision between civilizations and within communities lies at the heart of the story, highlighting the complexities and tensions that arise when different ideologies and identities intersect, ultimately shaping the narrative's essence.

"A Passage to India" beautifully captures the complexities that arise when different cultures collide and fail to understand each other. Despite Fielding's efforts to bridge the gap between himself and Dr. Aziz, societal prejudices and differences—whether social, religious, or political—prevent this connection. The British community, depicted as an exclusive and conservative group, is portrayed as clinging to their English traditions within an inhospitable environment, gently satirized by Forster.

Forster also unveils the intricate layers of Indian society, showcasing its rigid caste system and the tensions between different social and religious groups, particularly the uneasy alliance between Muslims and Hindus under British rule.

The novel's simple yet profound message is about the complexity of life and the necessity of shedding preconceptions and social conditioning to truly understand and connect with others. While this harmonious connection does not materialize in Forster's India, the novel remains an uplifting and enriching read, inviting readers to ponder the challenges and rewards of genuine human connection despite societal barriers.

References

Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*, Delhi: AITBS Publishers & Distributers, 2006.
---. *A Room with a View*, Aegypan, 2003.
---. *Howards End*, Aegypan, 1989.
A review by Alicia Forsyth. http://www.cufs.org.uk/films/heat and dust.html.
Agarwal, J.C. *Modem Indian History*, New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 2004.
Amur, G.S. *Indian Readings in Comonwealth Literature*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers,

1985.

An article by Gupta, Arpit. *British Form of Colonialism in India,* google website, Review, Friday, October 22,2023.

An article by Kohli, Suresh. "*The Alien Insiders",* THE HINDUSTAN TIMES WEAKLY, July
4, 1982

Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helan. *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature,* London: Routledge, 1989.

Beal, Samuel. The Buddhist Records of the Western World by Hiuen Trang, 1884.http:/books.google.com.inbooks

Fanon, Franz. *On National Culture in The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. contance, Hermonds worth: Penguin, 1982.

Forster, E.M. *Howards End*. http.//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/a passage LoIndia.

Forster, E.M. *Notes on the English Character in Abinger Harvest, Harmondsworth*: Penguin, 1996.

Ganguly, Adwaita P. *India Mystic, Complex and Real: An Interpretation of E.M. Forster's A Passage to India.* http://books.google.co.inbooks

Das, O.K. E.M. *Forster's India*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1977.

Shahane, Vansant A. *E.M. Forster: A Study in Double Vision*, New Delhi: Amold-Heinemann, 1975.

White, Gertrude. *A Passage to India: Analysis and Revolution*, http://www.portfolio.com/textsite.