

A Passage to India – A Passage between East and West

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on the relationship between the East and the West and the notion of the west on the east. To highlight this issue, an analysis of E.M.Forster's "A Passage to India" is taken for discussion. The themes of the gulf between the two races, the personal relationships, the achievement of harmony within man and the complex problems are brought to the forefront. The mindset of the Indians is realized through the character of Aziz and Forster openly brings out the idea of the natives as being superior to the West. The possibility of a friendship between the Indians and the English is brought out in the novel but at the same time it seems impossible because both are distinctive in their character and feature.*

Key words: *Orientalism, Reconciliation and harmony, ideology.*

I. Introduction

Foster discusses the possibility of interaction between the East and the West. Literature forms a major part in the interaction between nations. The concept of the West on the East is that they are simply barbarians, uncultured and illiterates and meant to be ruled and controlled. The West considers the East as orient and in literal an image of the "Other". The basic idea of orientalism is that east is what is not west but it is mysterious, holy, dark, strange, attractive and barbaric. In their concept and perception, East is unreasonable and people there are not themselves and therefore need to be ruled.

Right from the beginning till the end, the novel "A Passage to India", picturizes India as a holy nation, known for its ageless history, ruled by the British people (West). The meeting of Aziz and Mrs. Moore display the distinction between two countries and civilization, in general the Eastern and the Western civilization, and their upper hands of one over the other. West cannot identify, understand and agree with the perfection of the East. The British fail to agree with India and Indians that they are perfect in their own style and tradition, on whom the West (British) is just enforcing its power and strength in a brutal manner.

"A passage to India" is regarded as Forster's greatest novel, which stands as a valuable critique of British rule in India. In the novel, Forster uses themes – the gulf between people of different races, the need for personal relationships, the achievement of harmony within man, and between man and the universe to their fullest expression. It further presents the complex problems which are to be found in the relationships between the English and the native people in India. In the novel, the ruling Anglo-Indians, think of their rule as a burden nobly borne by them in order to civilize the native barbarians. This imperialistic prejudice results in the division of the rulers and the ruled, the Whites and the coloured. The characters in the novel are forced into confrontation with India which represents reality at its most complex: at one extreme, a landscape of hostility and negation, encouraging separation, and at the other the very ecstasy of divine love and unity. The caves destroy at a stroke all the reconciliation and harmony established and brings hostility, evil and negation. It is not always the right notion which the Western people have on the Eastern people, society and their set up. Here, the notion of nature, and its components are fine examples. Forster pours out his own conception of colonized India based on his several visits to India. The description of nature, the caves, and the people with reference to their culture shows the hegemony of the West on the East.

In the beginning of the novel, the characters are discussing as to whether it is possible to be friends with the English man or not. Further it brings to picture the existence of bribe, which the British people practised in India. They accept it and do nothing. Mrs. Moore says, "The English are out here to be pleasant". Mrs. Moore is a British woman who has perfect understanding of India and has good understanding of the Indians. Mrs. Moore and Adela are the British women who come to India to understand the "real" India: India is really for older. They present caves as "dark caves". Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance – tunnel into the circular chamber. This states that the country is still in darkness without light of freedom and selfhood. Cave represents the country.

While Aziz talks to Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested, they converse about the Mughal emperors, Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Aurangzeb.

"Akbar never repented of the new religion he invented instead of the Holy Koran."

“But wasn’t Akbar’s new religion very fine?”

“Miss Quested, fine but foolish, you keep your religion, I mine.”

Here, Forster brings to light the mindset of the Indian who with the character of Aziz, strongly condemns the imperial power of the rulers, because, the British people want to enforce their culture and civilization, but through Aziz, Forster openly brings out the idea of the natives that their own practice and ideology is far better than the ruler’s (British) concept and practice.

The echo from the caves is like the voice of the oppressed native people. They try to convey their emotion that no where the natives remain silent, definitely they will rage against their difficulties. The reference to Chandrapore as a place of immense heat dramatises the consequences or the impact of the rulers over the natives.

The novel talks about the possibility of friendship between an Englishman and an Indian, which will bring the possibility of friendship between the East and the West. The rulers do not have real sympathy for the suffering of the people meant to be ruled. They simply oppress the natives with their language, showy culture and influencing tactics. They never concentrate on empowering and enhancing the lives of the natives, instead they wish and plan to loot the wealth, enduring knowledge, etc.

When Aziz and Fielding meet one another again in the last section of the novel, there is no joyous reunion between the friends. Even when the misunderstanding is cleared, the conversation goes badly and the meeting ends with a complete separation between the two men. Aziz is paradoxically the instrument of reconciliation between himself and the British people.

In the last section, Aziz and Fielding start talking frankly and intimately about politics. They realize that their characters and way of life have changed radically for them to be able to continue as close friends. They have never been closer than now; and they speak more as an Englishman and an Indian than as Fielding and Aziz; both are angry and excited. Aziz begins to shout, Fielding mocks him and Aziz is enraged. They bring their horses nearer to embrace each other, but the horses swerve apart. This suggests that sub-human India is hostile to inter-racial friendships and therefore their union is transitory.

II. Conclusion

The novel as a whole symbolizes the notion that the peaceful union and perfect understanding or friendship between East and West is highly impossible because both are distinctive in their own character and feature which is far beyond the acceptance.

Work Cited

- [1] Forster, E.M.; *A Passage to India*; Penguin Books Ltd., New York, 1979.