



THE NOVEL “A PASSAGE TO INDIA” BY E. M. FORSTER REMAINS FULL OF THE SAME PREJUDICES IT SOUGHT TO ATTACK.

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Abstract

Post colonialism is a thought that emerged after the colonies gained freedom from colonial rule. This concept became prominent in the field of literature and it propagates the importance of celebrating the native culture over the colonial ideologies. Moreover a Post-Colonial text is supposed to be a response to colonial text, which contests the colonial ideology and colonizer's superiority. Accordingly “A Passage to India”, one of the prominent novels written by E.M.Forster, is considered to be a seminal post-colonial text because it seemingly attacks the colonial ideologies to a great extent by placing the colonized as superior. Nevertheless the novel is over loaded with prejudices under the guise of attacking it. Yet this is done in a subtle way. Therefore this paper explores how the novel subtly retains the prejudices of the colonizers against the colonized rather than challenging them. This paper employs a critical textual analysis by incorporating the theory of “Orientalism” by Edward Said.

Key words: Post colonialism, Subtle, Prejudices, Orientalism, stereotypes.

Introduction

“Colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods” (Loomba,). One may consider post colonialism as the period after colonization, taking the direct meaning. However defining the term “Post colonialism” is not as simple as it seems. Some scholars view “post colonialism” as “the transcendence of nineteenth century imperialism”, some view it as “symbolic of liberating emancipation for new nations”. Nevertheless for some Neo-Marxist and subaltern scholars Post colonialism has “become emblematic of continuing, and often veiled, oppression of the west over the rest of the world”. In terms of the intellectual paradigm of the term, the foundation lies on Said's theory of Orientalism. (Smith, 1996).

“Postcolonial literary studies developed originally out of African decolonization, with the early novels of Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o as models, they inherited an oppositional stance of colonial versus tribal or foreign versus authentic..” (Bruce king,2019). Generally the pre occupation of the Post-colonial texts lies on challenging or questioning the legitimacy of colonial ideologies, however Post colonial text is not only a critique of colonialism because some texts identified as post colonial texts do not state a single word about colonization. On the otherhand, some texts which are considered as post colonial texts appear to be attacking the premise of colonialism, however, deep down, it is full of the colonial ideologies and prejudices. Thus ‘A Passage to India’ is a good example.



Post Colonialism is all about the reactions of the colonized against the colonizers challenging the superiority of the colonizers. In terms of literature, many forms of literature were produced soon after the colonizers left the colonies up to date. These writings on the one hand challenge the validity of the binaries created by the colonizers and on the other hand uphold the values of natives by celebrating the native culture. West formulated the concept of “orient” and “occident” by creating several stereotypes about east. “Stereotype is a collection of prejudicial assumptions about the Orientals (east)” (Naghshbandi 2014). The west creates binary opposition between them and the east and they justify their presence in India and their right to colonize by saying the following reasons: colonized is inferior (in terms of religion, colour, morality, knowledge and culture), irrational, savage, backward, uncivilized, superstitious and feminine. These are the prejudices that colonizers have against the colonized, which the novel supposed to attack but ironically to a certain extent the novel remains full of these prejudices. Thus this novel is “loaded with colonizers’ ideology of superiority and presents India, Indians and their culture in a stereotypical way” (Naghshbandi 2014).

Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism

Orientalism is a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient was almost a European invention / construct who is the oppositional referent- the other- to itself- Occident, the west. Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short. Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. Having constructed “orient’ the west creates certain stereotypes about the orient and occident. (Said, 1978). Orient represents everything that an occident is not. These stereotypes about orient is included in literature, from being a myth it becomes internalized knowledge which makes these stereotypes look real and natural. Post colonialism attempts to re define the concept of “orient” by rereading the colonial texts in order to challenge it. But how far these texts are successful in exhibiting the superiority of the east, still remains a question.

Research Objectives

This study highlights how E.M.Forster’s fiction “A Passage to India” portray the prejudices of the west about the east rather than attacking them.

Research Question

The study addresses the main research question “how subtly is the novel portraying the prejudice and stereotypes of the west about the east, despite being a post colonial text?”

Methodology

The primary and secondary data are used for this research. Primary data are collected from E.M.Foster’s novel *A Passage to India*. The secondary data are collected from books, journals and research articles related to the



research topic. This research will be based on textual analysis by incorporating a deductive theoretical approach, engaging with already established theory, Orientalism by Edward Said. It also uses the descriptive analysis to expose how the novel retains the same prejudices it sought to attack.

Analysis

Since it is a Post-colonial text, there are several elements in the novel that challenge the colonial ideologies. Dr. Aziz, an Indian is portrayed as an educated and a civilized person. Though he is convicted with the suspicion of raping Adela, he is released unaffected. In addition Mrs. Moore, an English lady, is critical about the way Indians are treated and persuades Ronny to be kind to the natives. Indians are shown making fun of the British, Hamidullah says “red-nosed man”. But on the other hand her concern is confined to kind treatment but never seems to question the legitimacy of the empire and does not emphasise on decolonization. Ronny says “we are not out here to be pleasant, we are out here to do justice and keep peace”, “And English men like posing as gods”. As a post-colonial text this novel fails to promote decolonization instead proposes a modified/reformed colonization. Moreover the colonial enterprise operates upon several prejudices of which the incapability of the “other” to rule themselves is one, the utterance made by Ronny that “we are out here to do justice and keep peace” shows that east is incapable of ruling themselves. Thus British presence is legitimised. By giving voice to Ronny to talk about the prejudice the novel retains this prejudice

The west considers themselves superior in terms of religion, culture, colour of the skin, and knowledge whereas everything the orient represents is considered inferior. The association of west with superiority and east with inferiority is also a prejudice. This novel provides ample evidence for this prejudice. Dr. Aziz and professor Godbole are given prominence to a certain extent in terms of their education but both of them are caricatured as comic figures in many instances. In the first chapter Dr. Aziz is introduced as “he was all animation”. It is very ironic that Dr. Aziz is given a main role in the novel as a representative of India but he is made to wear dresses imitating English whereas not a single feature of Indians is imitated or even accepted by the English. Also Dr. Aziz’s residence, mode of transportation and manner of speaking etc are secondary or inferior when compared with Fielding. In addition Godbole is seen talking about very irrational things often cracking jokes. In the end of the novel he goes to assume duties as the minister of education. Forster, by making Godbole as a comic figure, tries to show how ridiculous and irrational the education system is going to be under Goddbole. Thus it shows that Indians, despite being educated, are incapable of ruling their country.

The portrayal of the physical setting is itself is based on the prejudice that colonised is inferior. “It is no city, but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. It is a tropical pleasance, washed by a noble river”. This shows India as an exotic place. By associating India with “forest” Forster tries to show Indians as uncivilized and savage. Moreover India is portrayed as a place of mystery and confusion “Nothing in India is identifiable; the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge into something else”. India is trivialized and equated with emptiness “[t]here’s nothing in India but the weather ... it’s the alpha and omega of the whole affair”. Moreover during the conversation between Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz in the mosque, Dr. Aziz portrays India as a



dangerous place, "...Leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills. Snakes also". This shows that Foster, perhaps, deliberately makes a native saying how dangerous his country is, in order to strengthen the prejudice.

Furthermore the inferiority of the colonized is reiterated and emphasised throughout the novel. The novel captures the superiority of "whiteness" by showing the dichotomy between whiteness and darkness in terms of skin colour. For the west "whiteness" gives legitimacy to rule the dark. This fact is further ascertained in the trial of Dr. Aziz, the police officer, McBryde says "darker races are attracted to the fairer race and not vice versa". This was a belief during that time which emphasized on the importance of saving white women from dark men. This novel strengthens that belief and this racism leads to accuse Aziz of sexual abuse whereas Adela has never professed. It is noteworthy that this ideology of the white is used to prove the savagery of the east by using this as an evidence to testify the accusation against Dr. Aziz. However there is an attack on this ideology because Amrit Rao makes a very rational remark as a response to McBryde's words, despite, this prejudice is apparent in the novel.

In addition to this the religious superiority of the west is retained by degrading the religion of the east. The Hindu temple is associated with erotic statues and portrayed as an abandoned and dangerous place (because of monkeys), perhaps this is deliberately done to justify the prejudice that east is inferior in the aspect of religion. Moreover in the novel Dr. Aziz is shown seeing pornographic pictures whereas Fielding is never associated with any immoral actions and thus represent standard and upright behaviour. Therefore these prejudices are portrayed in the novel.

The association of the colonized with barbarianism and uncivility is a prejudice of the west that justifies the colonial rule as a civilizing mission. This prejudice is attacked to a certain extent in the novel by portraying some Indians like Dr. Aziz, Hamidullah, Godbole and few others as educated, because education indicates civility. Yet the novel reveals this prejudice more than attacking it. In one instance when Dr. Aziz is sick, he is surrounded by his friends, mean time Feilding pays him a visit and the way his friends behave (staying near him staring at his mouth) creates humour and also indicates their uncivilized nature. Also in the train scene Mrs. Moore and Adela are served tea by an Indian, Mrs. Moore makes a remark by pointing at the place the tea was made (he makes tea near the commode), "rather a strange place to make the cooking". Further his weird remarks about the breasts of women and the way he behaves when he is called to the residence of Fielding ascertain the uncivilized nature of the colonized. Being a post-colonial text, this novel upholds the superiority of the colonizer in terms of religion, race, skin colour, morality, conduct and behaviour etc which seem to justify the colonial presence in India.

The west creates several binaries between them and the east, one of which is Masculine vs. Feminine. Association of feminine attributes with east is a prejudice. Indian women are totally disregarded in the novel and no prominent role is given to Indian women. But Dr. Aziz reveals feminine attributes: he is very emotional, sensitive and servile. Even his expressions resemble female. His feminine attributes are further proved by his cowardice, when he is asked to come to the police station he tries to escape from the back door, lack of bravery is obviously anti-masculine attributes. On the other hand Fielding is the perfect representation of masculinity. By showing this the novel once again retains the colonizers' prejudice. Furthermore portrayal of Godbole, a Hindu professor, as being irrational, superstitious and man of words, is once again revealing the prejudice, irrationality. And also he is reduced to a comic figure.



The most crucial part of the novel is the trial of Dr. Aziz, he is accused of attempting to rape Miss. Quested in one of the caves. The sexual charge against an Indian vividly elucidates Indians as savage and immoral. This prejudice is attacked to a certain extent because Adela withdraws the accusation and the judge gives verdict that Dr. Aziz is released unstained. Every English man is furious because the fact that east is being savage gives west the legitimacy to rule over. The superiority and validity of the empire are questioned at this point. In fact at this point all the prejudices of the colonizers are attacked to a certain extent. But one has to bear in mind the fact that Miss. Quested's words are ambiguous because she does not openly claim him as innocent. Rather she says that she is not sure as to what happened. The novel never reveals the reality of what happened in the cave. If it had shown the reality, Dr. Aziz's innocence would have been proved and the prejudices that east is savage, uncivilized and immoral would have been completely erased off. The fact that the novel gives no space to display the mystery in the cave once again retains the prejudice rather than attacking it.

So all along, this novel fails to attack the prejudices of the west against the east. Thus in a nutshell "Forster has portrayed the colonialist ideology of the superiority of white race and its culture and the constructed inferiority of India and the Indians in *A Passage to India*" (Jajja 39). The novel hardly displays the ugly realities of the empire. The natives were oppressed under the strong fist of colonial rule. But the novel does not give space to this portrayal. Further "he has presented the English as superior human beings, better administrators and responsible individuals. The Indians are presented as superstitious, diffident, irrational and excitable" (Jajji 48). Thus these constructed prejudices are apparent in the film. Perhaps we can say that a country may be postcolonial (being formally independent) but it is neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically / culturally dependent).

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