The Cladding Niceties of Colonial Ideologies of Change in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924)

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Abstract

No doubt that the colonial aspects of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* have been abundantly and fully addressed. Yet, there is apparently no study that has specifically examined the veneering nicety and philanthropy of certain colonial practices in the novel and their possible outcomes. Therefore, the current research paper intends to investigate the seemingly nice and compassionate practices by some English individuals in the novel as colonial ideologies—or at least operating within and motivated by a colonial background by way or another—which would assumingly in turn generate favorably colonial-oriented outcomes/change. The concern of the research paper at hand is thus to examine the nature of such colonial ideologies and practices, investigate their seemingly generous and benevolent intentions and attempt to find out what purpose they serve and what possible effects they might eventually produce.

Keywords: Cladding Niceties, Colonial, Ideologies, Change, *A Passage to India*

المجاملات المغلفة لإيديولوجيات التغيير الاستعمارية في رواية إي إم فورستر "ممر إلى الهند" 1924

ملخص:

لا شك أنه قد تم تناول ودراسة الجوانب الاستعمارية في رواية إي إم فورستر «ممر إلى الهند» بشكل كامل وواضح. ومع ذلك، يبدو أنه لا توجد دراسة قامت على وجه التحديد بدراسة وتقصي اللطف المغلف والمجاملات الزائفة والعمل الخيري لبعض الممارسات الاستعمارية في الرواية ونتائجها المحتملة. لذلك، تهدف الورقة البحثية الحالية إلى التحقيق في الممارسات التي تبدو لطيفة ورحيمة من قبل بعض الأفراد الإنجليز في الرواية كأيديولوجيات استعمارية - أو على الأقل تعمل ضمن خلفية استعمارية وتحفزها بطريقة أو بأخرى - والتي من المفترض بدورها أن تولد نتائج استعمارية إيجابية وموجهة. وبالتالي فإن اهتمام الورقة البحثية المطروحة هو دراسة طبيعة هذه الأيديولوجيات والممارسات الاستعمارية، والتحقيق في نواياها التي تبدو سخية وخيرة، ومحاولة معرفة الغرض الذي تخدمه وما هي الآثار المحتملة التي قد تنتجها في النهاية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المجاملات المغلفة، استعماري، أيديولوجيات، التغيير، ممر إلى الهند.

1. Introduction

Forster's *A Passage to India*—just like several other English novels written at the time of the British colonization—portrays and brings to the limelight the English colonial practices and ideologies of the time. The novel would eventually be considered to belong to the category of colonial literature, and even possibly the best manifestation of it: "Passage can be seen as at once inheriting and interrogating the discourses of the Raj. It is the limit text of the Raj discourse, existing on its edges, and sharing aspects of its idiom while disputing the language of colonial authority," (Parry 28). Even more, many would perceive Forster's novel as an anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism narrative suggesting that "the chief argument against imperialism in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is that it prevents personal relationships," (Hawkins 54). Still, whether *A Passage to India* and other certain narrative texts celebrate such colonial ideologies or disparage them is touched upon here for a common background.

It therefore remains relevantly valid for the research paper at hand to highlight the assumption that many English narrative texts written during the British colonization present and reflect the English colonial ideologies and practices and in a variety of ways. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, is an English narrative text that has largely been deemed to not only expose the inhumane and barbaric nature of the English colonial practices in Africa, but also condemn them. Forster's *A Passage to India* seems to adopt a relatively similar attitude towards the colonized people of India. The writer appears to be attempting in his novel to tell his readers—mostly the English audience—about a different India and Indians than those they know through colonial ideologies and traditional background knowledge.

In that order, Forster's *A Passage to India* supposedly provides and portrays an anti-imperial, anti-colonial rhetoric. Such rhetoric the novel presents also seems tangible, strong, moving, and apparently convincing. Yet, despite the narrative's vividness and the novelist's sympathetic authenticity in depicting colonial India, it seems that this is just the top of an ice-berg:

> If Passage is the great anti−colonial statement in English fiction of the first half of the twentieth century, and Forster the great debunker of imperial pomposity, then we can gain a stronger sense of his unfolding relationship with India, of which the novel records only a fragment, by paying attention to some of his other utterances on India. (Bradshaw 254)

Besides, such depiction of the novel also appears to principally suit the narrative form as it conventionally pays much more heed to the individual interactions thus favoring it over the collective exchange.

It is also assumed that E.M. Forster in most of his works introduces a humanistic writer of himself. This is so because it seems like the main belief presented and advocated in his works "is that individual human beings fail to connect because the humanistic virtues, tolerance, sympathy and good temper are ineffective in this world of religious and racial discrimination," (Devi 223). Yet, Forster surprisingly holds firm to the belief "that personal relationships can succeed, because values and noble impulses do exist within human nature" as well, (*ibid*).

In this regard, the novel seems to advance the proposition that tolerance is "the principle which causes society the minimum of damage, because it admits that the people who constitute society are different," (Furbank 98). In a relevant essay entitled "Tolerance" that Forster has written, he links the lack of tolerance to what he calls the inflexible and uncompromising assertions:

I have lost all faith in positive militant ideals; they can so seldom be carried out without thousands of human beings getting maimed or imprisoned. Phrases like "I will purge this nation", "I will clean up this city", terrify and disgust me'. (Stallybrass 45)

Accordingly, though embarrassingly harassed and besieged, it could be perceived that Forster sees with much clarity the 'personal relations' as a fundamental principle to his own set of values and beliefs. He thus seems to present himself as "the spokesman for a system of belief which has not lost its intrinsic worth, but which is hampered by its failure to prevail as an instrument of social change," (Bradshaw 44). Forster is also recognized to have exerted considerable efforts to understand the perplexity and importance as well of forging such personal connections. As the novel reveals, Forster's understanding of such detail has seemingly "involved the view that people could change the way they lived their lives due to fear and a sense of what social conformity offered," (Bradshaw 183).

Forster is known to have made two main trips to India. During those two expeditions, he is reported to have realized and consequently recorded a great deal of difference in India between his first and second trip. In view of that, when Forster returned home in 1921, he wrote a letter stating those differences:

English manners out here have improved wonderfully in the last eight years. Some people are frightened, others seem really to have undergone a change of heart. But it's too late. Indians don't long for social intercourse with Englishmen any longer. They have made a life of their own. (Bradshaw 189)

In a similar respect, some suggest that Forster resembles Gandhi in that they both "valued personal relations above politics, and criticized imperialist policies of discrimination under which personal relations were vitiated," (Beer 3). They both might have wished and envisioned India as a land for Indian-English coexistence as socially and politically equal human beings.

To that end, Forster is again reported to have written on the eve of Indian Independence hoping for a state of friendship between India and Britain and between the Indian and English peoples:

I do pray that young English people who like Indians and want to be with them will be encouraged to go to their country', which is precisely the decision Forster

made for himself when his liking for Masood took him there in1912. (Bradshaw 205)

However, the concern of the research paper at hand is to examine the nature of such colonial ideologies and practices—more particularly in the form of individual practices and personal relationships—in the novel under question. It intends to explore and investigate their seemingly generous and benevolent intentions and attempt to find out what purpose they might serve and what possible effects they might eventually produce.

2. The Veneering Niceties of Colonial Ideologies

2.1 Personal Relationships

Chaudhuri strongly criticizes [*A Passage to India* for] the reduction of the cultural apartheid of Indo-British politics into the personalized relationship between two men, Aziz and Fielding: At the root of all this lies the book's tacit but confident assumption that Indo-British relations presented a problem of personal behavior and could be tackled on a personal plane. (Lowe 125)

His main interest in his works is most often personal relations and society. And his last novel, *A Passage to India*, portrays the relationship between the British and the Indians in colonial India in the 1920s, (Madadyzadeh 103).

From its opening and through Indian and English characters, the novel depicts how personal relationships and individual practices are a major concern that creates intense anxiety, particularly for Indians. Building personal connections between Indian and English individuals therefore seems a pivotal concern of the whole novel. It could thus be assumed that one of the principal colonial ideologies the novel delineates is the perception of personal relationships between the English and the Indians and the perplexity of forging such bonds. This issue seems to be a central concern of the novel from start to finish.

As soon as the novel opens, readers are introduced to both Indian and English individual characters in the name of Mahmoud and Hamidullah; Aziz, Fielding and Mrs. Moore, her son Ronny, Miss Quested and others who are all exhibiting a spirit and attitude of apparent niceties and all pondering over the possibility of making friends. The Indian characters start reflecting over the prospect of making English friends. Likewise, Mrs. Moore, Cyril Fielding and Miss. Adela Quested start showing nice and understanding attitudes towards Indians as soon as they arrive in India.

The best case illustrating the significance of personal relationships is that bond established between Dr. Aziz and Mrs. More. In a normal circumstance and without considering any colonial backgrounds and realities, the personal connection between Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore is not expected to gain such momentum. It is supposed to simply be a human personal connection between two individuals that stands on mutual respect, understanding and mutual emotional responsiveness.

However, in the light of the English-Indian colonial context, both Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz exhibit an extraordinary potential of transcending above their traditional backgrounds and local affinities. They both reveal a unique attitude of difference, understanding and universal humanity. Both Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz possess the willingness to think and the courage to act outside the box; outside traditional backgrounds and ideologies. Through their personal bond and mutual understanding, they think and act in a way that opposes the established norms and thus open up new horizons and possibilities for life between the Indians and the English.

They demonstrate that harmony and coexistence are possible between agents of difference. Their friendship depicts that people can be brought closer together as long as they embrace and enact attitudes of universal humanity as their common ground. The personal connection established between Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore indicates that difference of color, language, ethnicity and other affinities are not actual barriers in the way of forming personal links. Through such bond, they impart the perception that once universal humanity is the common ground of any human connection, any human individuals can overcome any gaps and disparities.

Such human and universal values establish harmony and forge connections between different human individuals. Still, the novel also reveals that not all human individuals are ready and/or willing to adopt such human and universal values. It shows that almost all characters on both sides lack both the will and the ability to cover such gaps and transcend beyond such differing aspects. Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore might have exhibited a considerable thoughtfulness of such differences and have thus succeeded in finding common grounds of mutual respect and understanding.

Both characters—in addition to Cyril Fielding—seem to have demonstrated a spirit and willpower of universals that has eventually enabled them to transcend beyond such conflicting backgrounds. The overall approach and broader conception of the novel and most likely of the novelist stands with such compromisingly but universal position where both Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz have located themselves: “Try seeing Indians,” (Forster 16). Mrs. Moore apparently embraces and is furnished with a human ideology of universal understanding that materializes in a difference accommodating attitude.

Such an attitude demonstrated by Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding could assumingly be perceived as the most powerful and productive practice of a colonial ideology. They earn the respect and sympathy not only of Dr. Aziz, but also of almost all Indians. As a result, Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding—whether through spontaneous innocence or purposeful intention—have helped promote British colonial ideologies. Through accepting them as friendly human individuals and accommodating their backgrounds as English individuals, Indian people seem to also be accepting Britain as a foreign power and accommodating her colonial ideologies and practices, too.

Still, the existing variances within a colonial context seem to also frustrate the completion and perpetuation of such bonds. These variances represent the tip of an iceberg of a whole lot of the hidden portion of more serious differences and contrasting ideologies between the Indians and the English; the least of which is the

sense of superiority and dominance of the English as ruling class and sense of inferiority and subjugation of the Indians as the ruled class.

Given the colonial context within which such connection occurs, it carries loads of meanings and indications that go beyond its apparent innocence and simplicity. As a result and within such colonial implications, the characters' attempts at forging personal bonds are all deemed to fail:

While the characters attempt to make human contact through the barriers of ruler/subject, colonizer/colonized, the ghost of the 'Colonial Other' is continually present, ultimately proving stronger than personal relationships, (Lehmann 85).

The contradiction and contradictory outcomes of personal colonial ideologies in the form of personal friendships and nice individual practices is illustrated by Homi Bhabha as contradictory, complex, and simultaneously influenced and influencing at both sides:

[Bhabha] claims that power in the colonial scenario is never simply a one-way street. Instead, colonial ideas carry inherent contradictions that surface when applied to an Other. For Bhabha this is illustrated in the moments of doubt scattered across Passage and symbolized by the Marabar Caves, where the confident program of imperial power and knowledge is disturbed by what he calls, the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences', a threat which 'breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/Other, inside/outside. (Bhabha 155)

Such backgrounds of a colonial context in the form of "culture and racial differences, and personal misunderstandings" are what have eventually separated Aziz and Mrs. Moore and Aziz and Fielding, (Devi 226). It is even for political reasons, according to Aziz, that Indians tolerate the British:

Clear out, clear out, I say. Why are we put to so much suffering? We used to blame you, now we blame ourselves, we grow wiser. Until England is in difficulties we keep silent, but in the next European war–aha, aha! Then it is our time.... we may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will,

Karim will, if it's fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea. (Forster 315–16)

Therefore, political and colonial ideologies that might have misleadingly helped and encouraged building certain personal bonds such as that between Dr. Aziz, Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding are the same barriers in the way of forming true and authentic personal relationships between the Indians and the English.

Accordingly, although Miss Quested has regretted accusing Aziz, possibly even thought of dropping the whole case, and Mrs. Moore has tried hard to defend him, maintaining their personal rapport with Aziz has turned impossible after the trial. Brandabur in *Images of Women in Five Post-Colonial Novels* 1993, states that "the racist assumptions and psycho-pathology inherent in colonial imperialism" results in a "destructive impact on personal relationships," (93). It could therefore be strongly suggested that political and colonial backgrounds that might have allowed such niceties to occur in the first place have also thwarted them.

The British Raj would assumingly represent the English political ideology that would curb and frustrate any attempts of forming personal relationships between the Indians and the English. The incident of the rape accusation and the ensuing trial of Aziz demonstrates the political role played by the British Raj in the court proceedings of this case. After all, it seems like "even with the best of will, friendship is made impossible by the Raj; therefore the Raj must end," (Hawkins 58). Still, the Raj does not end; the English Raj remains and persists in fulfilling the political and colonial agendas, which stand behind his appointment and the main reason he stays in office.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a twist in the novel's line of argument; English colonialism is wrong only because it prevents forging personal relationships between the English and the Indians, it is wrong because it assumingly deters the forming of a nice imperialism. In other words, it seems like the novel does not in principal object to colonial realities per se, but to the undesirable practices and negative outcomes of it. Therefore, the novel appears in exposing and condemning certain colonial and imperial aspects to be advocating the proposition of a kind of nice and friendly imperialism, an imperialism that befriends the natives but continue to humiliate them and plunder their country.

Hence, it seems through the course of the novel's narrative events and given their colonial background that the forming of such personal relationships is difficult, probably even impossible. The novelist himself is apparently fully aware of such circumstance:

Fielding realizes the complex problems involved in befriending the colonized while simultaneously being one of their oppressors. He also realizes the presence of a "gulf" between the races which is a serious barrier that casts shadows at the possibilities of friendship and equality between them. Adela and Mrs. Moore also

realize that personal relationships, faith, and knowledge all amount to “nothing” in a country that defies reason and rationality, (Baker 83).

Accordingly, by the conclusion of the novel readers seem to eventually get a satisfying and fully informing answer to such proposition as a resounding ‘no’. It eventually seems that all attempts made at forming such personal ties have failed or been thwarted.

2.2 Individual Practices: The Bridge Party

The bridge party Mr. Turton throws represents yet another individual practice that would seemingly be deemed as a veneering nice activity of colonial backgrounds. It might carry with it a sense of goodwill. The party would also be perceived—according to the Indians themselves—as an extended sympathy. Mr. Turton himself states that he has intended the party to be “not the game, but a party to bridge the gulf between East and West,” (Forster 16). The Collector’s party is thus meant to bring the English and the Indians closer together and assumingly help them understand each other better.

People like parties and love partying. A party is a nice and lovely activity that brings people together; people of different and diverse backgrounds. It melts the ice and bridges the gaps of misunderstanding, distance and false assumptions. A party would also offer a rare opportunity for making new friends and opening new horizons. That is probably why the bridge party has moved the murky waters of the English-Indian context.

At the party, the invited Indians have supposedly engaged in friendly chats, conversations and other reflections with the English individuals. After all, this is a party and what a party principally does is bring people together to socialize and know one another better:

Reflections, conversations and dialogues build new social and individual imaginaries–visions of the world that create possibilities for change. They lift us out of despair and let us take new risks in our encounters with each other. (Zournazi 12)

Nevertheless, with the English-Indian colonial context, the bridge party thrown by Mr. Turton would by no means be interpreted fully as a philanthropic and solely friendly activity. It would have to underlie certain colonial ideologies and serve particular colonial purposes. It seems that the bridge party is intended to introduce the English who are colonizing the land as nice and friendly, but still are colonizers, which appears to be quite a twisted line of logic:

Following Fielding’s logic, then, the British occupation of India is finally justified. England is there just as a newborn baby is there to take some of India’s air, and no one should blame the new-born for breathing other people’s air. Like

Mrs. Moore, then, Fielding simply desires to replace the hostile official rule with the friendlier personal rule, a replacement. However ambivalent and troubling Forster's handling of English–Indian relations may seem to be, one thing that he never doubts is that the English are superior than the Indians; therefore, they should be allowed to rule the Indians, (Zarrinjooee 28).

Such an argument would stand on the fact that the English came to India as invaders, colonizers and imperialists. They did not come as friends or allies, and would never dare prove the same. Besides, if the bridge party is just a nice, philanthropic activity and a gesture of good faith and true friendliness, the English should have first deserted their status as colonizers and then throw parties as they wish for that matter.

Clearly though, this is not the case with the English in India and with their party. Far from it, the English have always looked down on Indians, exploited them and their country and treated them with the worst dehumanizing ways imaginable. The English colonizers have always attributed "to the Indians such pejorative qualities as obsequiousness and servility. … [and have held] a general British belief in India's incapacity for self–government," (Zarrinjooee 26).

It is also an established knowledge that parties held by the English in India or other colonies are generally confined to English people. The inclusion of the native or colonized people in such parties is a rare occurrence that might originate as an individual and nice initiative.

Therefore, when Mr. Turton—the Collector—consults Miss Quested about throwing a party and she agrees with the idea; they would both be assumed to have exercised and demonstrated a veneering nicety that has its roots in colonial ideologies. Miss Quested and Mr. Turton might innately enjoy emotional sensitivity as individual human beings, but it is hard to maintain that the party is solely built on human motives.

Even if these two English individuals have been motivated by human intentions, the colonial policies of English officials and the very nature of the English presence in India could be anything but human. In India as an English colony and with the English presence as colonizers, almost everything done is supposed to serve the colonial agenda: "Here, the colonial encounter is stripped of cultural or personal interaction, reduced as it is to serve the economic and political propellers of colonial rule," (Lehmann 86). Additionally and after all, the English officials in India are in control of the land, its people and almost all activities happening there. Once they see someone or something not working for their favor—for colonial interests—, they would quickly and easily curb it.

Hence, when Mr. Turton throws the party, he means it to be "not the game, but a party to bridge the gulf between East and West; the expression was his own invention, and amused all who heard it," (Forster 16). The party is thus basically designed to serve certain agendas; it is seemingly expected to clear the air and to bridge the gaps of misunderstanding and distancing between the English and the Indians. Whatever the purposes the bridge party is expected to serve, they seem to be compatible and in harmony with the English colonial bodies and individuals in Chandrapore; broadly speaking in India.

The party is thus—explicitly or otherwise—assumed to have certain agendas to serve that could eventually be deemed as colonial. In that order, most Indians perceive the party as a condescending act of untrue kindness and fictitious friendship. This group of Indians advances the same logic the argument of the current research paper defends: "*A Passage to India* presents politics as a barrier to friendship, and thus recognizes that politics provides a major context for the failure of friendship at the end of the book," (Stallybrass 315). Those Indians know deep down that the English presence in India is grounded on political and colonial backgrounds in which there is no space for personal and individual connections.

Indian individuals have engaged in divergently hot debates over this party. They have debated whether to attend as invitees or decline the invitation altogether. Still, even if the party included Indians, they would be members of the Indian elite or high classes. For those, however, the party has appeared to them as a sign of good faith, friendliness and an act of courtesy to be extended to the Indians. Hence, this category of Indians have felt the English extended sympathy and appreciated the exercise of such courtesy. Nevertheless, the majority of Indians more particularly those belonging to lower classes or castes depreciate the party and suppose that it has certain ulterior motives.

This particular outcome of the party further supports the assumption argued here; the party has served its purposes, colonial purposes to be precise. It has caused division and disagreement among the Indians themselves, which is a golden colonial rule, more particularly English; divide and rule. Most of the common Indians stick to their conviction that the English are colonizers and serves the interests of a foreign imperial power.

3. Concluding Remarks

The argument and analysis provided earlier have shown that the best illustrating attempts at building personal ties between English and Indian individuals in the novel enacted by Dr. Aziz, and Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Moore and professor Godbole; Dr. Aziz and Miss Adela Quested and Mr. Cyril Fielding and his Indian immediate contacts have all failed. Though having been nice practices, they have all for one particular reason or another represented instances of failing ends at the same time.

By the closing of the novel, readers come to learn how Aziz-Moore and Aziz-Fielding bonds have been suppressed and Mrs. Moore been forced to leave India. Dr. Aziz's cautious but growing connection with Miss Quested has also failed or been made to. Likewise, Professor Godbole's special appreciation of Mrs. Moore has been terminated through her enforced departure. Even Mr. Cyril Fielding's different and understanding attitude towards India and the Indians has been condemned through rejecting and isolating him by his English fellowmen.

In view of all that, it is herein concluded that all those attempts at forging personal connections between the English and the Indians and initiating certain individual practices like the bridge party have all symbolized a form of colonial ideologies. Despite their apparent nicety, they are assumingly nothing more than extensions of colonial ideologies and practices. With or without intention, building such personal connections between the English and the Indians would in due course have served certain colonial agendas.

Similarly, the same colonial and political ideologies that might have spared a temporary window for the demonstration of such personal relationships and individual practices to serve their interests have also been responsible for frustrating the forming and perpetuation of such personal bonds and individual practices. The analysis has clearly exposed how the political and colonial background of the English-Indian context have greatly contributed to the failure and termination of such bonds and initiatives.

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