

**Colonial Perception of Native Identity Construction: A Post-Colonial Study of Forster's
A Passage to India (1979)**

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Abstract

Representing the East through colonial lenses has become a colonial means of fabricating and manufacturing the Eastern natives in a way that suits the imagination of the colonizer. This paper argues the representation of Dr. Aziz imagined identity in Edward Morgan Forster's A Passage to India (1979). It aims at uncovering the ideological characterization of native English people in general but it puts more focus on Dr. Aziz identity as the central image which Forster highlights strongly in the novel. The orientalist discourse is treated in Forster's imagination of the East and Easterners. So this paper also attempts uncovering these colonial discourses and shows how they help in re-creating the oriental perception about himself and the occidentals about the colonial norms of human contact between them and natives.

Key Words: ideology, binary division, mimicry, hybridization, authenticity, identity, Orientalism, stereotypes, natives

Introduction

Colonial hegemony has always produced two kinds of colonized people. The first kinds are those who always seek how to resist colonialism by all possible means. The second types are those people who try to acculturate themselves with the colonial culture and try to close to the colonizer. The first type always uses the authenticity of their native identity as a shield against any changes that colonialism brings. So, they try their best to enhance their original identity and encounter colonial tools and stereotypes that distort the native culture as a means of legitimizing colonialism for natives as well as for peoples of the colonizers in their countries. Colonialism mostly uses pretexts to create a kind of national support for the military colonial adventures.

Yet, the problem here lies in the situation of the natives who admire the culture of the colonizer and try to find a position for themselves in that culture whatever the cost is. Mostly the cost is the distortion of identity of this kind of people who try to be mimic Western way of living and behaving to suit the imagination of the Western people. In fact, they do not care about preserving the purity of their native identity nor they can be accepted by colonizers to be like them and simply they cannot really change all their identity elements. All what they can do is to be mere tools that are exploited by colonial powers on the cost of the originality of identity, safety and independence of their own country.

Most of the studies that deal with issues of identity target identity in diaspora literature or identities of immigrants. However, this paper argues identity crisis

for people who are not immigrants, natives that accept and admire the coming culture or some of its features even if it is colonial and aims at exploiting them, their lands and treasures. They fall in the trap of multiculturalism and undergo the process of hybridization producing new identities that have similar features as the diaspora's does. This paper investigates such transformation in Dr. Aziz identity in *A Passage to India* (1979). It debunks the colonial ideologies of Forster which he puts in Dr. Aziz character and which tells what kind of natives colonial agenda tries to create. It also tries to show that even if a native citizen has accepted transformation to befriend or look like the colonizer in certain behavior, identity stays floating and cannot forget its native origin but at the same time it has lost its authenticity and is no longer pure. Dr. Aziz' identity seems very ambiguous in this novel; it becomes ready to melt in the colonialist's culture but still uncertain whether to welcome them as guests as the novel shows in its first chapters or to see them as colonizers. This paper uncovers such human contact and relationship with the colonizer and highlights Dr. Aziz stanc.

Colonial Imagination of the colonized Identity Reformation

This paper argues that *A passage to India* is a story that deals with how a colonized identity is framed to suit the mind of the colonizer. Dr. Aziz as the main protagonist in the story resembles the character that is made by Forster to accept English people in his own colonized land as guests rather than colonizers. E.M Forster's imagination of India, though he seems neutral at the surface meaning of the story, is in fact perplexing because he uses a language that seems in favor of Indians, but still the story is full with orientalist

stereotypical images about Indians. Dr. Aziz is just an 'exception'. In other words, Dr. Aziz is how Indians should behave with their colonizers. According to Forster, the character of Dr. Aziz is a modern, well- educated doctor whose friendly behavior with Western people should be the norm which Indians should adopt. However, this also does not suit Forster's mind as an orientalist, Dr. Aziz is still an Indian who can accept Indians from other religions much better than can accept to befriend English people at the end of the story.

Aimé Césaire finds that in a colonised nation, there will be 'no human contact, but relations in domination and submission.' (Césaire, 177), and while the characters conceive to build 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. (Makhijani, 2019: 274)

The human contact between the colonizer and the colonized should have borders. Césaire suggests that in *A Passage to India*, the colonized should stay ruled and inferior even if he is given the chance of being in contact with English people who are the colonizers of his nation and land. Dr. Aziz seem to have the readiness to totally change to be liked by Britishers, but in all cases and whatever he does will give him no right to deal with English people as one of them.

In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Said argues that the Orientalist approach amounts to a set of essentialist characteristics applied to the 'Orient' from a perspective which universalizes Western, or European values. While Forster challenges the way in which

these values are applied within the imperialist construct, he does not challenge these values *per se*. Rather, the English (imperialist?) values become corrupted through the corruption of the imperialist agents. (Ibid)

This era might differ from the period when Forster wrote his novel *A Passage to India*, but it seems as if the orientalist discourse is the same in universalizing the Western culture as the centre of modernization. Makhijani in the last quote believes in the imperialist production of natives to be Westernized. Dr. Aziz is described as modern by the author just because he tries to look like the English men, behave like them and speak like them. For Forster, Dr. Aziz, though silly sometimes and childish but he can be a good icon for the target production that natives of the orient should look like. Currently, due to globalization and the soft war, Orientals search for modernization in a process of Westernization and Americanization. It is simply the change of the oriental identity that is applied in this process. Yet, the question that is raised here: after being Westernized, will they be Western and accepted by Western people as Western citizens? Dr. Aziz is ready to be one of these types. In spite of the fact that Forster is the one who draw the imaginative character of Dr. Aziz in his work, but his orientalist and colonial attitude does not permit Dr. Aziz to be treated as a Westerner though Dr. Aziz is almost liked by more than one English person in the novel. Forster's ideology is not innocent. He simply draws the borders between the human contacts in the story. English should not trust Indians and Indians should stay inferior whatever they do for the good of their colonizers. The author simply

shows how the Indian Muslims object to British oppression and how their idea of freedom differed from the Hindus. There are a few strange contradictions in Aziz's nature. He is talkative and likable but stubborn and sometimes very childish. Forster calls India a muddle because several questions in his mind about India remained unanswered. (Pratap, 2018)

The orientalist discourse plays an important role in the framework of the story and especially in the construction of Dr. Aziz' characterization. For Forster, India is no more than a British colony and Indians are no more than the Other who cannot reach the place of the subject which is exclusive for the British colonizer. Many critics refuse the idea that Forster is an orientalist, but Amita Basu write in a review about the novel that Forster

depicts the Indian landscape as backwards and mysterious. Chandrapore is bleak: "the streets are mean, the temples ineffective." The Indian summer is a character in its own right, a monster that shapes moods and constrains plans. The Marabar caves, where *Passage's* central incident occurs, embody the orientalist notion of the 'exotic east.' Externally, the caves are unremarkable. Granite, small, undecorated. Inside, they have a bizarre echo. *Boum*. This echo powerfully affects at least two Britishers' minds. Clearly, for Forster, the Indian landscape has supernatural elements. It's dangerous and unknowable. This othering of India – clearly contrasting it with Britain: the cultivated, fertile landscape that birthed the Industrial Revolution – typifies orientalist othering. (Basu, 2020)

Basu does not reflect Forster's orientalist discourses on the land only, but she shows how English people in the novel are racist and always look down at Indian natives and treat them in a superior way. "The British administrators' wives, too, treat Indians with scorn, and infantilize them. When the Indian women invited to a British party turn out to know English, the British women exclaim, "How wonderful!" right in the Indians' faces." (Ibid) McBryde philosophically illustrates that if Britishers are born in India they would be just the same as Indians. "They can't help it. It's the result of being born below 30° South. If we English settled here, *we'd be just the same.*" (Ibid)

Consequently, Forster fails to finalize his novel away from orientalist and colonial discourses. The change of Dr. Aziz' identity, which Forster draws himself cannot but become an inferior Indian though the attempt of Forster to stand against the oppression of his people on Indians. The Britishers' racism towards Indian is woven by the same writer whom is seen by many critics as having a neutral stance and can provide an atmosphere where human contact can be normal. Forster's character of Dr. Aziz is accused of being sensual, violent and a criminal and at the end of the novel he goes back to his Indianness which he departs in the beginning of the novel to cope with the so-called modernized Westerners and fails in the orientalist perspective of Forster to continue because he is still one of the natives and should not be that close to Britishers., Dr. Aziz' thought of India's freedom is made by Forster to prove this fact. Dr. Aziz never looks at Britishers as colonizers except after the accident of Marabar cave. He treats them as guests for the whole story until they mistreat him and look at him as guilty. Forster does not tell

that Dr. Aziz is innocent nor he proves the crime. He just presents the situation as ambiguous as the Marabar cave as exotic perpetuating the orientalist discourses of barbarism, savagery and exotism which the East has always been exposed in other colonial texts.

Inconsistencies in the formation of Dr. Aziz Identity

A Passage to India deals with the possibility of making the British colonizer and the colonized Indians live as friends in the colonized land. Is it possible to be a friend with your colonizer? This question is raised by lots of critics who look at *A passage to India* as worthy of being studied. The core plot exposes the character of Dr. Aziz as an answer for this question for most of the story chapters, though, this fails at the end of the story after the accident of Marabar caves. Dr. Aziz at the end of the story goes back to reconsider his relation with Britishers and with his sense of nationalism. The formation of his identity is problematic because it is woven by an orientalist trying to say he is not a colonizer in many parts of the novel but his paradoxical attitudes uncover the ideology of making the contradictions of Dr. Aziz' character.

Marabar caves mark a sharp turn in his life and Aziz finds it difficult to control his emotions about the British. Adela accuses him of having molested her and a torturous sequence begins in Aziz's life where he desperately tries to regain the balance that once existed in his life. Caught in a bitter situation, he cannot respect the English any more like he once did. (Pratap, 2018)

The change of Dr. Aziz stance towards English people after the accusation caused a violent inner conflict. In fact, the writer

deals with the character of Dr. Aziz carefully to the rate that a reader would believe that the writer is an Indian in some parts of the novel. Forster tries to present Dr. Aziz in a good image despite the fact that he does not deal with other Indians in the same way and mostly they are misrepresented. The author does his best to offer a new identity that should suit the orientalist imagination about how Indian should be with their colonizers; natives should welcome their colonizers just the same way as Dr. Aziz does. Yet, even if natives did this, they should not think they have got the 'privilege' of being dealt with always as Western.

Dr. Aziz previous thoughts in the first chapters about the possibility of being kind with people who look at Indians from a superior position have changed after the mistreatment he faces got later. Forster intentionally makes what happens in the Marabar caves vague to serve some orientalist discourses as seen earlier. One cannot decide if Dr. Aziz is really guilty or it is just a matter of psychological hallucination and fear of Orientals that makes Adela accuse Dr. Aziz of following her to the caves and attacking her. Is that attack real or it is just a fake accusation against Dr. Aziz? Dr. Aziz after all is a native Indian and the changes that he tries to do in his identity to be a Western-like are not enough to end the story without returning him to the same stereotypical orientalist images about the Eastern men,

not only do Aziz's attempts at 'Englishness' provide their own barrier to real human contact, but the concept of an Anglo-Indian is refused by the English community. Bhabha describes this refusal as necessary to the maintenance of the colonial position; Colonial mimicry is the desire for a

reformed, recognizable Other, 'as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.' (Makhijani, 2019: 276)

We can look at how Dr. Aziz is embarrassed by the accusation after the true love he has carried towards British men and women. He almost has been going through the process of Westernization which Forster draws for his character in the story. But this leads to the centre and place of the subject which should not be given to an orient. So Forster creates a big shock for Dr. Aziz which is enough to make him think again and reconsider all the previous changes in his behavior, traditions and identity. It is only after this Marabar cave accident he thinks of returning back to his original identity. Bhabha looks at this as an attempt from Forster to deprive Dr. Aziz from the mimicry weapon which he has got to reach to the place of the subject. "Bhabha describes the difference between being anglicized and being English. Such an unstable and ambivalent identity construct threatens the colonial power structure, by problematizing the role of subject." (Ibid)

In fact, one's past become a part of identity whether it is liked or not. Forster makes a part of Dr. Aziz life as a native who tries to be British-like to suit his British friends, and at the same time he does not deprive his character from the reality that he is still an Indian and also a Muslim. After the Marabar cave accident Dr. Aziz wishes to go back to his original Identity. However, all what Dr. Aziz can do now is just to behave as native Indians; his identity cannot be free from the changes that happened once in his thoughts and behavior.

Dr. Aziz, although, has adapted himself to the western culture and attitudes

largely but still he has not been accepted by the Westerns- they never accepted him equal to them. He has been subjected to the level of humiliation by his British counterparts in the novel. (Jehangir, 2019)

Dr Aziz knows well that his people are humiliated by colonialism, but this does not prevent him from trying to be accepted by British people as one of them whatever the cost is even if it is his sense of nationalism. However, Forster' sense of racism and the orientalist binary division he has as a colonial agenda he must adopt, makes him end this 'prohibited relation' by creating a big split between Dr. Aziz and his English friends.

The humiliation at the hands of the British at Chandrapore still hurts him. The level of trust he once placed in Fielding has reduced. However, this is just a reflection of the turbulence Aziz has been through. The more he tries to get away from his dear friend, the more he finds himself being brought back by the next tide of emotions.(...) However, Aziz cannot disrespect his own emotions or his motherland India. Aziz is an inseparable part of the Indian culture and he and his coming generations will fight to retain his place there. He can break away from friends but not from his motherland and people. Forster again proves that India is as dear to Muslims as to Hindus. (Ibid)

Pratap's talk about Dr. Aziz increasing and decreasing emotions towards his people or Britishers is indeed a talk about psychological conflict, and a split of identity. Forster only tries to show how Indians are proud of their home India whether they are Muslims of Hindus. It is not a problem for Dr. Aziz to be in a Hindus community which he finds much

better to cope with than to be among Britishers. In all cases Muslims and Hindus participate the same land, almost the same culture and in Forster's thoughts all of them are colonized Indians

In Klinton Jack analysis of the character of Dr. Aziz, he says that " Dr. Aziz is a person of multiple characteristics that distinct him from other character in the novel. He exhibits contradictions and rash attitude and represents the whole Indians. It is therefore a reader develops interest in the study of his character." (Jack, 2017) It is possible to accept that the character of Dr. Aziz is full of contradiction and his identity show lots of inconsistencies, but of course this has no relation with the orientalist stereotypical images which Jack tries to confirm about all Indians. Dr. Aziz is a person what tries to cope with a new culture and who really tries to change his identity to suit certain people whom he thinks of as friends and whom he also feels proud of being in such relation. Forster lets the reader feel that it a privilege for the Indian to be in a close contact with the English people who are dealt with in the whole novel as holy. This never lasts; the story shows that one accident is enough to let Dr. Aziz live in a psychological conflict and soar regret all the rest of his life.

Aziz, through both his behaviour and his religion, provides Forster and his characters with a *recognizable* Other. Forster is unable to place Godbole within the Other construct of coloniser/subject, English/Anglicized, and as such he becomes yet more Other. (Makhijani, 2010: 276)

Conclusion

The colonizer always looks for ways of legitimizing colonialism. One of these

ways is representation. We are used to read the stereotypical images of exoticizing the orient, and drawing its people as savage, sensual, violent and barbaric people. Yet, *A Passage to India* produces another way of representing how natives should look like and deal with their colonizers. Forster's image of Dr. Aziz tells us that this character should be a model for all natives. He should change his thought about colonizers and deal with them as guests rather than enemies. Furthermore, natives for Forster should be fragile and easygoing people. The human contact between natives and colonizers should have certain borders and whatever natives try to do to suit the imagination of their colonizers, they should know they are still natives because they cannot reach to the level of the white man. Dr. Aziz does

his best to be as the colonizers wish, but at the end he is humiliated and accused of a crime by people whom he sees by him as so close and cannot harm him. Forster draws the character of Dr. Aziz, creates all steps in the novel and makes out of Dr. Aziz a toy in the hands of Britishers but at the end he reminds him that his contact with his master should stop at a certain point. Whatever changes a native does to suit the colonizer's perception, they would have no result except distorting their identity and become mere tools for their colonizers. They should know that being modernized never means being mere followers of their colonizers. Dr. Aziz is a good example of such transformation but at the end of the story he cannot but be an Indian in the eyes of his colonizers.

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