

The British Education Policy and Colonial Discourse: A Case Study of *Passage to India* by E. M. Forster

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Abstract

The Indian education system was replaced by the British system, recommended by Lord Macaulay. The main objectives of an education system, according to the international norms, is development of critical thinking, logical reasoning, character building, love for one's nation and humanity, and service to God. However, the colonial attitude was totally against such approaches. British education system was introduced to create a group of literate Indians who would assist the British in ruling the country and in strengthening their political authority. The colonial system of education kept suppressed the nationalist feelings of Indians and changed the basic philosophy of their life. The English writers of the colonial period also advocated the colonial policies in their texts and tried to justify the point of view of the colonizers. A Passage to India by E.M. Forster also reflects this view point. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the colonial attitude of the ruling British about delivering the education in India. The research method is qualitative and analytical; the text is studied for the identification of colonial discourse about the education system and is analyzed in the light of relevant critical study from various dimensions. The analysis reveals that the texts of the colonial period reflect the colonial policy.

Keywords: Colonial educational policy, colonial discourse, impact on the colonized society, A Passage to India

Introduction

Colonialism, as a socio-political, cultural and ideological phenomenon has been informed, controlled and determined by the Western imperial project. This is a common knowledge that the colonizers not only controlled and exploited materials and human resources but also resorted to social and ideological engineering of the colonies in order to prolong their occupation. For this purpose they employed various discourses embedded mostly in the educational system, culture, literature and languages imposed on the colonized. In the texts, written by the colonizers, during the colonial period, the colonial policies run through the narratives as a thread, though in different colours as far as the age, socio-economic and academic backgrounds, interests, professions, and ideologies are concerned. Said (1983) and Gandhi (2008) observe that texts are implicated in their economic and political contexts. Thus from the contexts, the critics expose these policies

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through various tools and theories. For instance, critics have identified the presence of colonial discourse in: *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, , *Hill of Devi*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Kim*, *The Commitments*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *A Passage to India*.

A Passage to India is about the arrogant attitude of the colonizers in colonized India. The theme of the novel is the relation of the colonizers and colonized and the indifferent attitude of the ruling race towards the subjugated. The irresponsible attitude of the British colonizers divided the Indian communities into further segments. The aggressive behavior and disaffection among the communities created a social split. Despite odds, the Indians were living quite peacefully, if not harmoniously, before the arrival of the colonizers; the disintegration among the Indian communities on several grounds is caused by the colonizers.

This study is an attempt to reveal the counter-productive impacts of the colonizing strategies on the peaceful co-existence of the communities in the civilized world. The objective of the study is to explore, analyze, and interpret the strategies of Forster with special reference to colonial education system. The main focus of the paper is to find out the answer to the research question, i.e.: what devices are used by Forster to highlight the point of view of the colonizer and the colonized about the education system introduced by the British Raj? The significance of the study is to extract the historical and political perspective of the colonial writers in their literary works. The research work is a new avenue for the critics, linguists and students of language and literature and particularly the educationists.

Review of Literature

The main objective of East India Company was the economic exploitation of India. Ali (2012) confirms this observation and states that the British arrival in India was an act propelled by trade incentives under the patronage of the East India Company. Ziltener and Kunzler (2013) have identified the motives of the East India Company as:

- The drain of wealth to the mother country
- The control over production and trade
- The exploitation of natural resources
- The improvement of infrastructure

The obvious objectives of colonialism were to control the colonies for economic exploitation. With the passage of time, the colonizers also focused on the social devastation of the colonized. The main targets for social destruction were the education system, culture and language. The British colonizers established the education system in the colonized territories for the promotion of their own interests. The established systems were then supported by the English poets and writers with colonial discourse. The narratives, dialogues, characters and themes of their works reflect the colonial attitude in the colonies. The ulterior motives of the Europeans are shrouded in the colonial discourse. Colonial discourse is, in fact, the social practices and attitudes associated with

colonialism. This discourse reflects the strategies, atrocities, jealousies, rivalries, avarice and point of view of the colonizers.

Bhabha (1994) indicates that the objective of the colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and establish a system of administration and instruction. Césaire (1955) considers colonialism as the dehumanization of the dominating, colonizing country. Colonization works to de-civilize, brutalize and degrade the colonized. Ahsan (2016) agrees with Bhabha and Césaire. He states that colonialism is a strategy for exploitation in which a strong nation extends its rule over the territory of another nation beyond its borders. The subjected population is then kept in control for exploitation.

A Passage to India

The novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is concerned with the relations between the English and the native population of India during the colonial period. The setting is the first quarter of twentieth century and the action takes place at Chandrapore, which symbolizes colonized India. Wolpert (2004) links the novel to the time of Indian political struggle and adds that *A Passage to India* is set at the beginning of India's movement towards independence. The point of Wolpert is confirmed through the colonized character, Hamidullah, who is a distant relative and friend of Dr Aziz and a notable lawyer of Chandrapore. He got his education at Cambridge University. Hamidullah refers to the death of Queen Victoria during his discussion with Aziz and Mahmud Ali and adds that he attended the funeral of Victoria.

The text highlights the gulf between the two races, colonized and colonizers. The ruling group openly portrays the English as superior and owing to this attitude the novel as a whole symbolizes the notion that the peaceful union and perfect understanding or friendship between East and West is impossible. Johnson (2000) observes that one of the themes of the novel is that people from different cultures rarely understand one another. Pirnuta (1973) links the culture with the theme and states that the novelist suggests that though men may be well-intentioned, outside circumstances such as cultural difference and the interference of others can conspire to prevent their union. However, Bentley (1948) argues that theme of the novel reflects relationship between the colonized and colonizers. He further states that conqueror and conquered cannot be friends. This is also the focal question of the novel which is supported by the following points:

- The difficulty of English-Indian friendship
- The unity of various communities
- The “muddle” of India
- The negligence of British colonial government

White (1970) is of the view that the major theme of E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* is cultural misunderstanding. Cultural ideas and expectations regarding hospitality, social proprieties, and the role of religion in daily life are responsible for

misunderstandings between the English and the Muslim Indians, the English and the Hindu Indians, and between the Muslims and Hindus; as they have their own cultures and want to remain adhered to it. Naghshbandi and Zarrinjooee (2012) suggest that social values among the communities are the basic theme of the novel. They further highlighted that Forster shows how English traditions have, on the one hand, nourished complacency, hypocrisy and insular philistinism, while on the other promoted humility, honesty, and skeptical curiosity. The colonial discourse can be gauged through the lens of attitude of the characters, their dialogues, the narratives, events, idioms, proverbs and figures of speech. Hossain and Rehman (2012) consider it a bundle of truths about the British Raj in India; a fragment of the myth of colonialism, an interpretative discourse that depicts both angst and anxiety emerging from the Diaspora of political, cultural and racial differences. The text portrays the inner and outer feelings of Indian society and the attitude and behaviour of the English settlers during the colonial period. Forster tells us about the complexities and conflict that is reflected in the social, cultural, psychological and political life of the British and Indian people. He compares the living standards in India and England and argues that the people of England are living a pleasant and civilized life as compared to colonized India. The chaotic situation in Indian society is owing to the colonialism where the people are subjugated and are living an oppressed life.

In the context of colonialism and post-colonialism, language has often become a site for both colonization and resistance. In particular, a return to the original indigenous language is often advocated since the language was suppressed by colonizing forces. The use of European languages is a much debated issue among postcolonial authors. A novelist expresses his or her ideology, philosophy and style through language. For instance, Lodge (1966) observes that language is the medium of expression of a novelist. The novelists of colonial period express the issues of colonialism through language which is challenged by the critics. They indicate that the colonial novelists express their views through ideas and knowledge which assert motives of the colonizers. From their language, the embedded sense and motive in the discourse can be extracted with the help of literary theories like Feminism, Marxism, Modernism and Postmodernism.

Macqueen (2007) observes that over time, the children of the colonized Indians were educated in the elite schools and universities of the imperial "motherland" for further brainwashing. Forster has used the linguistic tools like idioms and proverbs, figures of speech to convey the sense that the English language is superior. For instance in the first meeting, between Dr Aziz and Fielding, Fielding uses Scottish idiom - Ihaemadoots. It is a bewildering situation for Dr Aziz and his prompt response is that he does not know the meanings of such words and phrases. Dr Aziz feels himself in a lurch when Fielding uses the idiomatic expression such as, I have madoots, which in fact is a Scottish phrase (idiom). The literal sense is: I have my doubts. The idiom is used for the disagreement with a different view, but with some consideration of reality and skepticism. This lengthy etymological and colloquial interpretation and understanding is quite difficult for a non-native colonized like Dr Aziz.

Interestingly, the discussion is not limited to idioms or proverbs. A prime example is that when Fielding uses the word *prig* for Adela Quested, it is a new word for Aziz, and so he asks for explanation. Similarly, Adela Quested and Mrs Moore cannot communicate with the Indian ladies due to language problem. Forster states that at the occasion of Bridge Party, Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore are quite happy as the Indians are present around. However, they cannot communicate with each other. The main hurdle is the language; they cannot speak the Urdu or Hindi languages and the Indian ladies don't know English. The limited linguistic skills reflect the imperfect English of Dr Aziz, when he intends to write a letter of apology and courtesy to Adela's Quested. Professor Godbole puts the English idiom, the pot calling the kettle black in a wrong manner and says the pot and the kettle. This shows his limited knowledge of the English language.

Hindi and Urdu are well established languages in India. However, rulers don't give any serious heed to learn them for interaction with the Indians. The colonizers have learned a few local words and they are used in conversation in imperative form. The junior officers learn these words from their seniors. Ronny is fresh in the administration, so he refers to his senior for using such words. For instance, he has learned the word 'izzat' from Major Calendar. The colonizer women are giving instructions to their Indian servants during their speaking; therefore, they know certain words but only in the imperative mood. Forster (1991, 56) states, "Mrs Turton had learned the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and of the verbs only the imperative mood". The main hurdle is the language; neither of the community can speak Urdu, Hindi and English languages.

Muhammad Latif, a distant cousin of Hamidullah who lives with him, is totally illiterate. At an occasion, Dr Aziz while introducing Latif to Mrs Moore says that Mr Mohammad Latif is a shy person of old fashion sort, and does not like to shake hands with the English ladies. He prefers *salam* and "He knows no English". Forster wants to convey the sense that the Indians are old fashioned nature. He also criticizes the attitude of the educated Indians who consider themselves superior to the less educated group. Gronstedt (2007) states that Dr Aziz also plays on the prejudices of the English by giving them what they expect of the Indians. It is conveyed through the character of Mohammad Latif who is an Indian of old fashioned sort who prefers *salam*. Here Aziz presents a caricature of the Indian character; a silly fool who has failed to modernize and so knows no English. He is presented as a funny old man. Gronstedt further adds that Aziz's act can be read as ironic with the purpose to show the objectification his kinsmen suffer under the British. The irony is that Dr. Aziz criticizes Latif for his ignorance of English language but puts the sentence ungrammatically, "He knows no English". The correct sentence should be "He doesn't know English (language)". At another occasion, during conversation with Mrs Moore, Dr Aziz puts an English idiom, "sailing in the same boat" as sailing in the same box.

The main characters, the educationists, are Professor Godbole and Fielding; however, they are depicted as the antithesis of each other. The British educationist

Fielding, the principal of Government College of Chandrapore, is humble, tolerant, intellectual, sensible, sensitive, friendly and accommodative. He has developed sustaining relationship with native Indians and is a close friend of Dr Aziz. He completely rejects the colonizers and their attitude towards the Indians. He is a true reflection of the theory of Memmi (1965) where the colonizers characters can be divided into two categories; those who accept and those reject the colonial attitude in a colonized country. However, at the end, he changes his point of view. Memmi (1965) states that Fielding cannot completely join the Indians because above all he is still British and therefore, holds the same ideas and prejudices that he grew up with him as a colonizer. In the end, he goes back to his own people, marrying an English girl and becomes a part of the imperial society.

The Indian educationist Godbole, a professor of Philosophy at Government College Chandra pore, on the other hand, is depicted as a clown, a Brahman Hindu who is not taking any interest in his profession. Though he is a professor of philosophy, he is a deep religious and spiritual individual, who is reluctant to become involved in human affairs. He intends to open a school in his own state, in Central India (Mau) and wants to take charge of education there. He informs Fielding that at present there was only vernacular education at Mau; now he plans to start a High School there on sound English lines. However, he is a bit confused about giving a name to the school. He is quite keen in an English name by saying that, "I had thought of the Mr. Fielding High School, but failing that, the King Emperor George the Fifth School". Thus Professor Narayan Godbole is presented as a keen supporter of the colonial policy.

The Nature of Education Policy in Colonized India

Colonial education system was not developed for the promotion of learning; rather, it was a process by which the colonizing power assimilated its way of thinking and attitude in the colonized. When East India Company came to India they realized that the vernacular system of education encouraged religious and patriotic sentiments among the natives that could affect the business of the Company. It was through the Charter Act of 1813 that a state system of education was officially introduced in the Indian history. This clause of the Charter Act of 1813 compelled the East India Company to accept responsibility for the education of the Indian people. As a result, from 1813 to 1857, the company opened many schools and colleges under their control, which laid the foundation of the English system of education in India. Historically the reforms in the colonial education system from 1813 to 1947 can be divided into following seven phases.

- The First phase 1813-1835
- The Second Phase 1835-1854
- The Third phase 1854-1884
- The Fourth Phase 1882-1904
- The Fifth Phase 1904-1919
- The Sixth Phase 1919-1929
- The Seventh Phase 1929-1947

The colonial education system was based on the policy of T. B. Macaulay which is called the Minute by of British education prepared in February 1835. All the above phases reflect this policy in true form and spirit.

This situation can also be judged in the words of Macaulay, when he said that the goal of Western education was to “form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” His prejudice attitude toward native Indian literature is reflected by his other statement in which after acknowledging that he does not know Sanskrit or Arabic, but said that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (Nayapalan, 2007). Macaulay always strongly advocated for changing the spirit of Indian education system. According to him “If the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation” (Somal, 2015). One may ask whether this colonial attitude to education was ended with the end of colonial rule in the Sub-continent, or it is still on move with its full force.

Conclusion

The British conquered the other countries and kept them in control to strengthen their economy, which led to promote capitalism. For the justification of exploitation, the colonizers employed various discourses embedded mostly in the educational system, along with culture, literature and languages. In the texts, this colonial discourse runs through the narratives as a thread, though in different colors, socio-economic and academic backgrounds, interests, professions, and ideologies of characters. However, ideologically, the Indians are quite sensitive to their culture and religion (Hinduism and Islam) which have outshined their abilities and capabilities. They integrated religion and culture and the text reflect several narratives and events about the religious sensitivity and prejudices of the Indian characters. Although, some of the characters are educated in Great Britain, for instance Hamidullah; but the Western education does not play any active role in transforming the personalities of the colonized.

Colonialism is quite fatal for the human values and norms, social interaction, intellectual capability and spirit of equality. The British claim was based on the logic and argument that they came to the colonized countries to free them from ignorance and to inculcate in them the virtues of civilization and culture. However, in the garb of civilizing the people, the policy of colonialism played havoc with the feeble nations particularly with their education policy. Forster argues that that the Indian education system cannot be effective in promoting universal understanding and values.

The education policy formulated by Lord Macaulay still exists in our system consciously or unconsciously. This policy has tarnished the education policy of our country and the basic needs of an education system to promote critical thinking, logical

reasoning, character building, and patriotism have always been ignored. The basic logic of British education system was to introduce and create a group of educated people who would assist the British in ruling the country and strengthen their political authority. This research paper indicates that the literary figures of the colonial period also advocate the colonial policies in their texts and tried to justify the point of view of the colonizers.

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