

# Literature analysis of a passage to india by e. m. forster

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E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India*, is a look into the lives of both the colonizer and the colonized. While the plight of the colonized is tragic, filled with degrading images of subjugated civilizations and noble people reduced to mere laborers, it is the colonizer, the British of India, and their rapid change from newly arrived colonist to rigid and unforgiving ruler that draws my interest. The characters constantly comment on these changes that occur to the British once they adjust to the imperialist lifestyle.

In the second chapter of the novel Hamidullah, a Muslim character, remarks to his friends, " Yes, they have no choice here, that is my point. They come out intending to be gentlemen and are told it will not do. . . . I give any Englishman two years. . . . And I give any Englishwoman six months" (Forster 7). Miss Quested constantly worries about becoming this caricature of her former self and also recognizes the changes in her husband-to-be, Ronny, as he fits into the British ruling class lifestyle.

Fielding looks at the uncaring people his compatriots have become and marvels as he befriends an Indian Muslim. Is it possible that colonialism has an effect on the colonizer as well as the colonized? Forster clearly demonstrates that colonialism is not only a tragedy for the colonized, but effects a change on the colonizer as well. But how and why does this change occur? Aime Cesaire proposed that it is simply the savage nature of colonization that changes man into their most primal state (20). This does not work because there is no blatant savagery as in *Heart of Darkness*.

Forster doesn't seem to be parading the cruelty of the colonizer. Thomas Gladwin and Ahmad Saidin suggest that the change is simply the myth of the

white man as the British citizens assert their crowns of supposed natural, higher intelligence and worth (47). This does seem to be a good argument because of the superiority that the British colonists take upon themselves in the novel, sequestering themselves in the British club that no mere Indian can be a part of. However, it doesn't account for the more inquisitive and benevolent natures of Adela and Mr.

Fielding and their acts and opinions toward the Indian people. In his essay "Shooting and Elephant," George Orwell states that: When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives,' and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him. He wears a mask and his face grows to fit. (152)

Orwell suggests that the change is merely the taking on of a role and that the colonizer is an actor required to play the part of the British ruler. It is expected by the native people, and also by their fellow colonists. This expectation is shown through the comment of Hamidallah and his insistence of the inevitable change. It is expected. It is the acceptance of this role is the change that affects the characters in *A Passage to India*, and if this is the accepted norm, then it goes to reason that those who do not accept it will find themselves outcasts of the society they reject.

This is what I intend to show by comparing the plights of Forster's characters Ronny, Adela, and Fielding, as I explore their differing approaches to this role and the effects that come of either accepting or rejecting it. The first groups

of colonizers are those who accept the act of leadership whole-heartedly. They separate themselves from the population, declaring their own superiority over the masses as they build their walled compounds content to be out of sight and sound of any Indians, with the exception of their servants (of course) (Kurinan 44).

They seek to make Britain in India, rather than accepting and glorifying the resident cultures. They remain strangers to it, practically living in a separate country they provided for themselves, yet ruling one that they remained aloof from (Eldridge 170). This is the Englishman or woman who feels that without British rule everything will fall to ruin and chaos, anarchy being the ruling class in their stead (Kurinan 33). This is also the class that Albert Memmi, author of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (and a former colonized citizen himself), calls the "colonizer who accepts" (45).

It is the colonizer who accepts his or her given role as ruler and god over the colonized people. Memmi supports Orwell's idea of the role they play by stating that "the colonizer must assume the opaque rigidity and imperviousness of stone. In short, he must dehumanize himself as well (xxvii). " Those who accept the role of the British administrator lose a part of themselves in the process, becoming an actor instead of a man, doing what is expected, not what is right. Forster picks up on this idea as well. Ronny Healsop is the character that exemplifies the ruling class of the nineteenth century British colonizers.

He fulfills the characteristics of the administrative class. He adopts the aloof and chilly manner that was characteristic, caring only about his superiority

over the Indians and his evenings at the club with his own kind (Kurinan 43). He shows his callousness and robotic adherence to his role as magistrate in India in an argument with his mother. 'We're out here to do justice and keep the peace. There's my sentiments. India isn't a drawing room. ' 'You're sentiments are those of a god,' she said quietly, but it was his manner rather than his sentiments that annoyed her. Trying to recover his temper, he said, 'India likes gods. 'And Englishmen like posing as gods. ' 'There's no point in all this. Here we are, and we're going to stop, and the country's got to put up with us, gods or no gods. . . . I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I'm not a missionary or a Labor Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I'm just a servant of the Government. . . . We're not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do' (51-52). Ronny dehumanizes himself with his constant ravings about having more important things to do in India than being pleasant to the " natives. He puts himself up as a god, only there for justice and to hold the country together by force. He sheds any ideas of sentiment and in doing so shows how such ideas are looked upon with derision by the ruling class of the colony. Adela, Ronny's intended fiancée, recognizes this loss of humanity in him from his arguments. She thinks about his manner and it upsets her that " he did rub it in that he was not in India to behave pleasantly, and derived positive satisfaction there from! . . . The traces of young-man humanitarianism sloughed" (52).

What she doesn't realize is that Ronny is merely accepting his role as Orwell's " conventionalized figure of a sahib" and Memmi's typical colonizer:

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harsh and cold with no time or inclination toward sentiment. Adela Quested is troubled by this conventionalized role. She comes to India to see its wonders and to connect with its people. Her first moments of seeing Ronny are telling because they show her reluctance to take upon herself the role of the British administrative archetype. She marvels at how he has changed and how unsympathetic he is to those he rules over.

This idea is something that haunts her as she continually struggles with the role she must take on if she marries Ronny and remains in India. She has a hard time reconciling the notion of the India she sees with that she must be apart of. " In front, like a shutter, fell a vision of her married life. She and Ronny would look into the club like this every evening, then drive home to dress; they would see the Lesleys and the Callenders and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite them and be invited by them while the true India slid by unnoticed" (48).

Adela does not wish to be a part of the society that Ronny is so fond of. She even goes so far as to ask an Indian about how she can avoid becoming as the other women, something that no other British woman would do. As she rejects her role as actress in the British imperial play, Adela becomes Memmi's " colonizer who refuses" (19), becoming contemptible in the sight of the English society of India. Those who did not accept this role were viewed as the enemy in the imperial point of view. Memmi points out that those who enter the colonies must accept or go home. There is no middle ground.

Those who show signs of humanitarian romanticism are viewed as the worst of all dangers and are on the side of the enemy (20). Adela's thoughts are always viewed as naive and idealistic, but everyone has faith that she will fit in in time. The British laugh at her notions of wanting to see the real India that they try to shut out every day, but they figure that she will fall in line in the end. But what happens if she doesn't? Adela's refusal to pursue charges against Aziz when she realizes her folly in accusing him of attempted molestation leaves her ostracized.

She rejects the role of imperialist colonizer and must live with the consequences. Those who were once her greatest supporters, fawning over her illness and pretending to be so caring and concerned, now become her most vehement enemies. Memmi observed that those colonizers who felt their ideas were betrayed became vicious (21). As Adela found out after her acquitting remarks on Aziza's behalf, her friends turned against her, her superiors denounced her, and even Ronny left her. Adela realizes that if she doesn't choose to wear the mask of imperialism that "one belongs nowhere and becomes a public nuisance without realizing it. . . I speak of India. I am not astray in " (291). One key element of her statement is that she is only a nuisance in India. Memmi asserts that those who are good cannot stay in the colony (21). The best of people must leave because they cannot accept the consequences of their remaining as a colonist. This idea also shows that these changes in character are only exhibited in India. The English in England share differing opinions and ideas. They are not caught in the play as the colonists are and so it shows that a definite change exists between leaving England and acclimatizing to India.

Therefore, Adela, although cast out from the imperial administrative class of , may remain unchanged and return to . The last character is that of Fielding. Fielding takes on the role of the colonizer who refuses, but he takes a different path than Adela. Instead of leaving he turns to the colonized for support. Fielding always connects with the Indians. He has no qualms about speaking to them or visiting them in their homes, even visiting Aziz when he falls ill. He doesn't frequent " the club," because he doesn't share all of the same opinions that the ruling English colonizers do.

Fielding also realizes the truth that the real India lays not in the British imperial scope, but in the Indians themselves. When Adela is expressing her desires to see the real India, Ronny asks Fielding how one sees the " real India. " Fielding's answer is " Try seeing Indians" (25). This question results in many of the people at the club talking about how they see too many Indians and too often. This comment about seeing the real India through its people, however, shows a definite sympathy with a conquered people, more than any of the other British people were willing to show at any point.

Fielding takes his rejection of the imperialist nature so far as to support and defend the natives against his own people. When Aziz is accused of assault on Adela, Fielding is the first to come to his aid, forsaking his own people. He even defiles the sanctity of the club, choosing it to be his battle ground and denouncing his own people and the play that they have chosen to act in. He makes a very bold statement to the amazement of his fellow British subjects. He declares, " I believeDr. Aziz to be innocent. . . . If he is guilty I resign from my service, and leave India. I resign from the club now" (210).



He completely rejects his people in their chosen sanctuary, defiling their temple of Britishness and becoming their number one enemy. He is immediately denounced as he rejects this role of imperial aristocrat for benevolent humanitarian. He refuses the mask and doesn't just walk away from it, as Adela must eventually do, but he stomps on it. He in no way forsakes his British heritage, but he realizes that friendship is possible with the Indians, and he is willing to fight for his cause. He becomes the moral hero to the Indians, a quality that Memmi says is important to his acceptance into their confidence.

But, Memmi also states that Fielding cannot completely join them because above all he is still British and therefore holds the same ideas and prejudices that he grew up with (45). That is unavoidable because, after all, Fielding is still a British citizen, something that can't be erased. In the end Fielding does turn back to his own people, marrying an English girl, but I think it is significant that he returns to England to find this girl, who is connected with Miss Quested and Mrs. Moore, the two idealistic characters in the novel. Fielding becomes more of a part of the imperial society with his marriage ties, but he remains free of the change that occurs in the colonies by making his match away from India. He stays free of the role of imperial actor and continues on with his notions of friendship and peace with the Indian people. I assert that Forster presented Fielding as an example of how to resist the imperial Indian machine and yet still maintain his British culture. Fielding is the most sympathetic, not wavering on his regard for the people, only realizing the differences that may lie between their personalities and cultures.

When he becomes the "colonizer that refuses," Fielding shows that resistance of the changes that come upon the colonizer is possible and that the role of imperial actor may be refused. Imperialism was a British institution for a long time. It brought British people in contact with many cultures and peoples. It also helped them to affect a great amount of change on indigenous ways of life. The images and accounts of the brutality and callousness of the Imperial administrators are legendary and will always be the most examined part of its long stretch until its fall in the twentieth century.

These effects on the native cultures are important, as are the accounts of their plights, however now we can see that Imperialism and colonization didn't only affect the colonized, but that it had an effect on the colonizer as well. Aime Cesaire stated that "colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the nature and justified by that contempt, inevitable tends to change him who undertakes it" (20). Living the life of imperialism has its stamp. It can't help but have it.

As George Orwell insinuated, it is a play, and the imperial citizens and administrators were actors, trying to play their parts as demi-gods with great confidence and authority (Kuinan 55). When any person did not live up to the art of performance, they either returned to England or joined in the plight of the native, being ostracized from their "people." Forster presents a picture of this Imperial England. *A Passage to India* provides a perfect stage in which to watch the action play out among those who accept their role and those who rebel, whether knowingly or not.

His portrayal of the characters Ronny, Adela, and Fielding show the three different types of colonizers that Memmi observed in his own life as a suppressed " native. " Each character portrays a different situation and mind set, demonstrating the different alternatives in the colonial/imperial life. Through these characters we truly see the effects that imperialism had on not only the colonized, but also the colonizer, showing that no one is immune

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