

A passage to india: imperialism

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Discuss Forster's portrayal of Imperialism in the novel A passage to India A passage to India by E. M. Forster is a novel which deals largely with the political, economic and social takeover of India by the British Crown. The novel deals widely with colonialism and more specifically, imperialism. Forster presents the theme in question through the lives and minds of the characters from both the Indians and the English people. There is no subjective undertone to the novel and we see clearly how each character feels, politically correct or not.

Forster successfully presents different scenarios and relationships with the assistance of symbolism and imagery, for us to imagine and determine a path to where it may lead; based on the concerns the book shows us. The narrative plays host to an array of themes and consequences present for both parties. The way in which Forster captures the imperialist ideology against the backdrop of a wondrous India and its people has been done so to give the reader a completely unbiased focal on the themes, but still create an enduring curiosity to how the back-story will affect the current affairs.

With the thought on imperialism, rather than take the novel on a tangent of complete political movement, Forster chose to focus on people, relationships and the development of characters. Through this liberal approach it allows the reader to delve into the matter with an open mind, to develop own opinions and comments. To allow for all sides and notions to be represented, Forster seemed to develop a character for each.

The idea that Indians would be facing an uphill battle trying to forge friendships with the English was represented in characters such as

Hamidullah who implies that possibly both races can be friends but never under the current circumstances, and represented less progressively in Mahmoud Ali who presents a stubborn anti-British attitude. The ignorance of the British arrival in India is not unnoticed in the characters of Adela and more extremely in Ronny, who not only suffers from ignorance but has adopted the belief that he is superior to all Indians.

Towards the beginning of the novel, or before the pinnacle turning point in the novel, Dr. Aziz and Fielding appear to be the level headed characters representing both races. Dr. Aziz is introduced in the opening chapters venting his frustration about the way the English treat him and other Indians, but never resorts to derogatory remarks or insults. He always appears to maintain a clear outlook to how he feels and why. Fielding, a British Official working in India demonstrates a humanitarian attitude towards Indians and treats them with kindness.

As the novel develops and further embarks into the theme of Imperialism, these two characters allow us to see how this factor can affect and damage morals, relationships and opinions. The characters are almost representatives of the theme in question and they take the reader through the journey of the rise and fall, the pros and cons and the damage imperialism and colonialism as a whole can cause. The portrayal of Imperialism in the novel is largely unbiased from Forster himself.

In the novel Forster exposes all emotions and attitudes from both races, because the novel is not written from the perspective from one race, or one side - it is written from the perspective of people - all anxiety and true

emotion is exposed with little room for covering up British snobbery or submissive Indians, all is advertised. The ignorance on both parties is available, whether or not the ignorance is justified or not is irrelevant as it is all personal opinions. As Hamidullah says " They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter.

And I give any English woman six months. All are exactly alike. " Ch. 2 page 8; His feelings towards English appears bitter being that he was once treated with respect as a guest in England but in his own country due to Imperialism he is the enemy, the disobedient and the inferior, he seems exhausted and could possibly have at one point enjoyed the company of Englishmen when he was a visitor in their own country. It is evident now that he feels all Englishmen are hopeless, in the end they all conform to the Imperialistic movement and behaviours which encourage racism and a general bad attitude to the Indians.

Hamidullah notably gives English women a much shorter tether probably being that they only communicate on a personal or sociable level and have no need for professional pleasantries before adopting the imperialistic traits. Forster himself having lived in India is divulging an exaggerated experience of his time there, he is magnifying issues which are completely evident in the force of Imperialism but had never been acknowledged in this way before. There will always, like with any topic be novels which contribute mere nods to the opposition with a main focus on the protagonists encounters, this is not what Forster set out to do.

His approach, although himself anti-imperialist is very liberal in that he highlights and presents the Englishman, his “ undeveloped heart” and narrow-mindedness to an unknown world to which he must adapt, or mustn't as the story goes. An issue what can also be questioned in the novel is if Imperialism itself is the problem, or the way in which the British conduct themselves when India, under Imperialistic ruling. The behaviour of the British can be summoned on many different tangents from Imperialism. The topic of race and supremacism is rooted throughout the novel as a side note to the bigger picture of Imperialism.

It is clear from the novel that with British ruling an automatic entitlement to superiority is present, as said by Mrs Turton to Adela. Adela being a somewhat open minded individual displays no major signs of racism or gives the notion she is superior to the Indians, but nonetheless Mrs Turton imposes an extremely heavy remark on her as it were quite trivial - " You're superior to them, anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they're on anequality. To say such a racist remark so unintentionally demonstrates the notion that Indians are to submit to the British because that's the way it is. There is no method in the madness of allowing Imperialism to develop further division with racism and disrespect to the host and their country. This deterioration is evident in the relationship between Dr. Aziz and Fielding. The relationship between Fielding and Dr. Aziz is almost a representation of the Imperialistic time, and how it developed. From the beginning of the novel the reader understands both characters have equal respect for one another and their races.

There is an understanding of differences but maturity to overcome these nonsensical differences and forge a friendship. This can be seen in light of Imperialism, where there was a forced unity of cultures, this could forge new friendships, allow cultures to sample the traditions of others and increase quality of life and become cultured. Instead, a stubborn and adamant behaviour from the British forged nothing but resentment between both races and began the belief that the take-over of the land equated to no equality.

Translated into the novel, the incident which saw Dr Aziz face trial for the accusation held against him by Adela in the caves shows us where the friendship deteriorated, the relationship between both races which came to be, which was condemned by Hamidullah in the beginning had begun to conform to what Imperialism appeared to represent. After Adela dropped her accusation against Aziz, and everything was as it was in the beginning of the novel it was suggested Aziz and Fielding should resume their friendship but on reflection Aziz agrees with Hamidullah - there is no room for friendship between the Indians and the British.

Their relationship, unlike that of the many other characters was not superficial. There was true equality amongst the men, noting definitely their differences but not considering they were of inferiority or superiority to one another. They represent both cultures as well as equal men but the ever present Imperialism is there to collapse any bridge of friendship, as Aziz implies there will be no friendship until the British have left, or left on the principles in which they arrived.

At the end of the novel Fielding questions Aziz as to why they cannot be friends, because they both want to be? This shows the reader that there is still a sense of naivety in Fielding that he and the rest of the British have to work on. They do share the same perspective as the Indians, the problems which have arose and how they can be resolved is seen by Aziz. Aziz knows that there is no room for friendship, at least not now - " they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices 'No, not yet,' and the sky said 'No, not there" Ch. 37.

And so it can be seen that the theme of Imperialism throughout Forster's novel is seen from many dimensions, the idea of Imperialism, and colonialism can be seen to be infected, the unnecessary behaviours which they have assumed go hand in hand with Imperialism have to be stopped. The portrayal of Imperialism by Forster as said is a very liberal and open minded approach in that he has exposed all dimensions and has no shied away from the resting fact of what should be questioned - Imperialism, or the way in which the British conduct themselves behind the wall of Imperialism.

What they consider acceptable and what is not. The novel in its entirety delivers an excellent insight from all perspectives into the system. The reader is left with Forster's own personal experiences and sometimes his own personal statements throughout the novel whilst being given the opportunity to identify the flaws in the system for themselves. Forster, E. M A Passage to India, 1994