Human’s Connection In E. M. Forster’s A Passage To India

Introduction

The trajectory of the relationship between the colonised and coloniser in English literature has been discovered through the writings prominent author namely Doris Lessing (1919-2013), Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) and E.M. Forster (1979-1970). Canonical writings of the aforementioned writers like The Grass is Singing (1950) and Heart of Darkness (1902) for example, portray the perils of transgression against humanity and oppression of the subaltern race. Historically, in colonial era, people with different skin color are discriminated, perceived as an entirely different class of human race or perhaps lesser than that as what Conrad mentions in his novel: “an improved specimen”. Lessing on the other hand, presents the horror of Black slave vengeance upon a ruthless White woman. Therefore, these kinds of narrative which display conceited imperial pride of the White prompts a question that can be critically discussed through E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India which: Is colonial friendship White and non-White attainable?

Likewise, E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India (1924) presents an account of connection between two dichotomies of human races – superior and subaltern, Brown and White, English and Indian – where racism is certain to happen. A Passage to India, a tale that shows the complexities and paradoxes of Indian and English relationship against the backdrop of oriental, exotic India, and the mystery of it. As Fang (2013) states that India in this novel, exists as a cosmic symbol that represents a chaotic, inexplicable and incomprehensible universe (p. 61). Chandrapore, the fictional city of the novel exists as a site of colonial interaction where Aziz first met his English friends and also a site of contention between two races. As mysterious as the title goes, A Passage to India brings the mystery of human sphere in

A Passage to India is named after Walt Whitman’s poem “A Passage to India”. Both piece from Forster and Whitman thematise the same concept which is the alluring journey of the mysterious and exotic “Bharat Mata” through the eyes of a Western Man. Bhattacharjee (2013) in his essay provides a comparison of Indian connection in both masterpieces where Forster examines the racial misunderstandings and cultural hypocrisies that take place within the complex interactions of Indian and English; whereas Whitman envisages the spiritual passage to India – the divinity and mysticism of it – which is illuminated by the “Asiatic” and “primitive” fables. Through the mystery of India, lies another mystery which the peculiarity of human connection. A Passage to India can either be read as a story that recounts a beauty of friendship or the futility of friendship between English and Indian; even though the latter seems to dominate the whole narration of the novel.

A Passage to India is considered as one of the most important English literary pieces in the 20th century. As profound as it sounds, this novel is constructed by an anti-colonialist with a wider vision of humanity and betterment of society. As a humanist, Forster believed that by constructing a proper relationship, man can attain order and peace in this world (Hazra, 1987, as cited in Fang, 2013, p. 63). Forster also shows his subtle modernist trait in A Passage to India where he projects a “wider vision of a universe of ultimate nullity: one existing out with consciousness and its powers of assimilation; outside human orders of language, logic and

reason" – a vision that is shared by many modernist authors (Stevenson, 2007, p. 216). Forster's insightful ideologies of humanism, modernism and anti-colonialism transcend the social binarism and culture of racism that challenge the structure of colonial society in India.

This essay provides an investigation of human connection between the characters of A Passage to India. In particular, this essay emphasises the paradoxes and complexities of human connection between Indian and English as the colonised and the coloniser. This essay also equally highlights the aspect of human folly and the loss connection between the characters.

The Colonial Connection

The dichotomy of human connection between the colonised and the coloniser

Existentialist Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) believes that "existence precedes essence". Sarte postulates the principle of existentialism where "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (Sartre & Mairet, 1975, p. 3). Therefore, a man's life is defined by his or her relationship with other people which is the human connection. In regard to A Passage to India, the human connection revolves around the social strata of Raj society where Forster thematises the subject of colonial friendship between English and Indian that is foregrounded by racism and scepticism. The colonial connection that Forster limns in his novel happens to show the vain side of that propagates and disseminates racism towards the Indians.

Foster's critical stance of his own race is revealed as he cynically drives the English characters in his novel reek with racial sentiment. This is perhaps why Forster and his writings are interpreted contentiously where he is perceived as a token for lamentable naivete, an illustration of the fallacies of liberal humanism and also a last remnant of imperialism (Armstrong, 1992, p. 365). Moreover, Foster construct A Passage to India in a favourable light of the Indians where some of the narrative imply that no matter how decent and dignified the English are, there will always a boundary that keeps them from perceive the Indians as an equal.

For instance, Superintendent McBryde who Forster describes as the most reflective and best educated of the Chandrapore officials is not excluded from making contentious remarks of how "the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa" and how the psychology of crime in India differs from Britain. McBryde's hypocritical, remarks somehow reflect how distorted is the human connection between the colonised and the coloniser where the scheme of the crime and the criminal is classified according to race and skin colour of the perpetrator and the victim. It implies that the rape allegation of Aziz is more horrific compared to the case they had in Britain as it involves the mentality and behaviour of a Brown man towards a White woman which appears as a foreign temptation – calling it a desire of the "Other".

Furthermore, Mr. Turton the District collector who is known to treat the Indian with a slight respect unlike the others contends that there is nothing but disaster when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially (p. 174). In this case, Superintendent McBryde's and Mr. Turton's scepticism of the Indians plausibly pertains to the term "othering" where the coloniser can define itself against those it colonises, excludes and marginalised with its own established subjectivity in the pursuit of power (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 158). Mr. Turton's accusation of

social relationship impasse between English and Indian is based on his twenty-five years' experience of India – a great number of years – adequate to deduce the fact that he is well conversant of the sociological aspect of Raj society. Yet, it is irony how Mr. Turton fails to build a sincere, humane connection with the Indians despite knowing India like back of his hand which renders him just same as the other unapologetic coloniser who is absorbed in its own imperial ego.

It is interesting how Forster drives the character of Aziz as an Indian man who is smitten by two English people – Fielding and Mrs. Moore – whose benevolence and benignity transcend beyond races and skin colour. Both Fielding and Mrs. Moore possess their own stance in perceiving mankind collectively. Indian for Mrs. Moore, is part of the earth and she fervently believes that God has put the human on the earth to be kind to each other as God is the love Himself (p. 70). Fielding on the other hand believes that the world is a "globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can be best to do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence" (p. 80). Fielding's humanitarianism and Mrs. Moore's Christianity outlooks resonate their purity of connection with Indians and their genuine feeling interacting with them. Suffice it to say that both Fielding, and Mrs. Moore does not have the attitude and the superiority of a coloniser.

Albert Memmi in The Colonized and The Colonizer posits how

The connection of Aziz and Mrs. Moore is established upon a mutual respect and cultural understanding therefore marks its sanctity. Their first meeting which happens in a mosque acts as a symbolic of a peaceful union between Indian and an English. After being left hanging by Major Callendar, and his tonga being snatched rudely without permission by Mesdames Callendar and Lesley, Aziz takes some rest in the mosque while contemplating over the agitation that he had towards the English previously. Aziz who is described as an Indian Muslim who admires the beauty of Islam and appreciates the sanctity of the mosque for its tranquillity, could not help but be touched by Mrs. Moore's courtesy towards the sacred mosque.

Perhaps, what touched Aziz the most is the fact that Mrs. Moore shows her benevolence and wisdom in acknowledging the God of the mosque – the God of Aziz by removing her shoes before entering the mosque. Aziz instantly smitten with Mrs. Moore's sincerity whose he found none on the previous English who unfairly treated him before. This may explain how Aziz becomes emotionally attached to an old lady whom he just met coincidentally as she respects not only him but his religion equally and on top of that, the old lady happens to be an English. During their first meeting, Aziz and Mrs. Moore established a strong emotional connection for they resemble each other in having three children and their spouses have already passed away; like Aziz says, "a same box with a vengeance" (p. 44).

London (1994) has a different view of Aziz and Mrs. Moore first encounter as for her, the particular mosque scene resonates the construction of Aziz's sexuality. London (1994) furthermore contends that there is a definite hint of a sexual menace for when Aziz surprises Mrs. Moore and when Mrs. Moore is unveiled as inaccessible to Aziz, his loss of words seeing the old Mrs. Moore is interpreted as disproportionately devastating (p. 86). Although there is a plausibility in London's arguments, London however, disregards other reasonable fact that prompts Aziz's loss of words – "A fabric bigger than the mosque fell into pieces, and he did not know whether he was glad or sorry" (p. 43). It could be that Aziz is either he is delighted as old

people are usually generous with forgiveness or he is burdened with a guilty conscience for he just yelled at a woman who is old enough to be his mother.

The Irony of Adela’s and Aziz’s connection

The connection of Adela and Aziz sparks its own irony. Adela, an outgoing and exuberant young lady who dislikes the idea of English superiority eventually instigates Aziz’s hatred towards English. In Adela’s mind, she is perhaps the last English person who would ever treat Indians poorly let alone wrongly accuse them. While she does not intend to do so, Adela hauls the entire in Chandrapore to criticize the uncertain rape allegation and causes an intense rift between Indian and English. On the other hand, it is not always clear in the novel of how Adela perceives Aziz. Some critics suggest that Adela’s hysteric behaviour may come from her own repressed desire towards Aziz although Forster clearly mentions that Adela “did not admire him with any personal warmth” (p. 163).

Moran (1988) posits, that with Adela’s mind preoccupied with the thought of marriage and nature of love, any assault of her senses would likely be interpreted in a sexual manner (p. 601). Furthermore, Adela’s hysteria could be connected to her own psychological realisation that a loveless marriage with Ronny would be equated to the alleged attempt of rape in the cave (Moran, 1998, p. 601). The fact that Adela’s mind is replete with the thought of marriage and top of that, she unintentionally offends Aziz with her impudent question of polygamy may contribute to the frenzy that she has in the cave.

However, it is unsettling that Adela suddenly realises her true feelings to Ronny and how the loveless relationship should not be pursued while climbing the rock of Marabar Hills. Moreover, her sudden realisation is accompanied with her unconscious description of Aziz as a “handsome little Oriental” (p. 163). As Suleri (2005) puts it, “the discourse of friendship becomes the figure of how imperial eyes perceive race” (p. 135). As an educated, attractive young doctor who is able to speak English fluently, distinguished him from the rest of the uncivilized Indians and certainly attracts Adela who in the midst of questing India.

However, imperial eyes of the English are not only to be blame in this colonial context as Adela is also equally perceived as being “uglier than the gentleman” by the Indians crowd. Moreover, Aziz makes shallow remark of how Adela practically has no breast and those inadequacy would be acceptable for English but not Indian. This explains the cultural complexities of English and Indian where human body and appearance are no longer subjective but perceived as a label that can be dichotomised into race’s suitability. Furthermore, Aziz’s remarks carry the undertone of racism when he starts comparing human body parts of Indian women and English women.

Perhaps, Adela becomes desirous seeing how Aziz, a mere Indian is more superior and appealing than her in sense of marriage and attractiveness while she and Ronny – the English – who are not just lack of physical charm but also emotional connection with each other. In a pessimistic view, Adela in this case could reflect the remnant of her imperial pride as an English – thinking how can a man of the subaltern race becomes more “humane” than her? Likewise, Sharpe (1993) states that Adela’s chaotic mind that is divided between the thoughts of her marriage and her boredom with Aziz’s effort of showing ‘the real India’ unveils a “tension between the double positioning of the English woman – as inferior sex but superior race” (p.

79).

Adela’s remnant of imperial pride is reflected by her superficial sense of visiting India at the first place where Fielding contends: You have no real affection for Aziz, or Indians generally…The first time I saw you, you were wanting to see India, not Indians, and it occurred to me: Ah, that won’t take us far (p. 258)

This by perchance explains why Fielding calls her a prig and sees her as “one more pathetic product of Western education” (p. 131). As young English lady who is fresh from England with no prior encounter of people other than, it is understandable how senseless Adela could be in interpreting India and Indians. It may be implied that when Fielding sees Adela as a product of Western education, he sees Adela as a fellow English who is imbued with the occidental thoughts and perceive India as a fascinating, uncivilized colony that need to be explored for its mystical, oriental attributes.

This accusation of Adela, of course sounds quite hypercritical. However, her superficial thought is what distinguishes her from Fielding and Mrs. Moore who see Indians first and foremost as a human, not a colonial subject of. Likewise, Nafi (2016) argues that Adela’s failure in understanding Indians is due to her materialistic relationship in the sense that she wants to explore the “real India” and thinking that India exists in one man which is Dr. Aziz (p. 24). Perhaps, Adela’s enthusiasm in exploring India impedes her from comprehend the bigger picture of India and the elements that constitute it – which are not only the tangible, bizarre landscape, but also the Indians as the existing cultural counterpart of it.

The connection between Adela and Ronny on the other hand, is much more unsettling as their relationship seems to share a little emotional connection let alone romantic feelings. As

After Aziz is released, Adela starts to receive enormous of hatred upon her action in acquitting Aziz. Das (1977) remarks how Adela getting the worst of both worlds where she has antagonised the Indians and renounced by asserting Aziz’s innocence (p. 66). Consequently, she is denied by and Ronny Heaslop breaks off their engagement seeing her as a traitor of their race. Adela is perhaps the most pathetic character Forster in A Passage to India looking at how Forster constructs her character as Ultimately, Aziz acknowledges Adela’s courage and writes her an apology letter even though it took him two years to relinquish his enormous ego towards the English. Aziz’s acknowledgement of Adela reveals his magnanimity towards the English but not his entire forgiveness.

The Camaraderie of Aziz and Fielding

A Passage to India recounts a pure, platonic friendship of Aziz and Fielding unlike other Forster’s controversial writings, Maurice (1971) which deals with the theme of homosexuality and published a year after Forster’s death in 1970. Fielding’s unwavering support to Aziz during his trial is perhaps the most loyal act of friendship that one can offer. Knowing that he would probably be shunned by his fellow English, Fielding earnestly believes in Aziz’s innocence and devoted to it.

Aziz’s and Fielding’s sanctity of friendship however, calls into question as it arouses many interpretation and inference of its homosexual attribute. Critics like Sara Suleri in her book

chapter “Imperial Erotic” suggests that there is a sexual tension between Aziz and Fielding that is camouflaged under a colonial friendship. Their friendship, as Khan (2016) puts it, exists as a great fantasy of the “homoerotic undertones” (p. 230).

As the character of Aziz is constructed mainly on Syed Ross Masood, a friend of Forster. Forster in his interview with Natwar Singh in 1926 explains how Aziz is created on the image of Masood, his greatest Indian friend (as cited in Rahman, 1991, p. 78). This proof alone suffices to indicate Forster sincereity in establishing a connection with the Indians. Fielding on another hand signifies a sincerer friendship and connection to Aziz compared to Mrs. Moore who flees to England in the name of Ralph and Stella instead of testifies in the Court on behalf of Aziz. The way Forster limns the impossible friendship of Aziz and Fielding suggests his unattainable desire for his own friend, Masood.

The English’s “Going Native”

Fielding’s impartial treatment and friendliness to the Indians whom Aziz in particular, reveals his humanity more than others. Fielding’s connection with the Indians is more than a coloniser “going native” but it is a pure, genuine human connection between Indian and English. According to Ashcroft et al, (2007), going native also encompasses within the lapses from European behaviour, the participation of the ‘local’ ceremonies, the enjoyment of or the adoption of local customs such as clothing, food, recreation and also entertainment (p. 106).

Fielding’s wisdom lies in his short but meaningful statement of “Try seeing Indians” in answering Adela’s curiosity of how one explores India (p. 48). Fielding’s shrewd judgement indirectly shows his allegiance to the Indians suggesting that what else could be better than interacting with the Indians vis-à-vis. On top of that, his willingness to organise a tea party for the newcomer, Mrs. Moore and Adela accompanied with Aziz and Godbole shows how sincere he is in making connection with the Indians.

Robert J. C. Young in Colonial Desire explains in the reference of Jean Rhys’s novel where the characterisation of English experience is portrayed in the need of otherness:

The fixity of identity for which Englishness developed such a reputation arose because it was in fact continually being contested, and was rather designed to mask its uncertainty, its sense of being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other (Young, 2005, p. 2)

Young’s argument could be equally applied to A Passage to India

Human Folly and The Broken Connection

Aziz’s and Fielding’s bittersweet reconciliation at the end of the novel symbolizes the failure of colonial friendship that adds flavour to the incompatibility of Indians and English. Aziz profoundly answers Fielding’s curiosity of “Why can’t we be friends now?”:

But the horse didn’t want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the Guest House; that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath; they did not want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘no, not here’

(p. 316)

Aziz’s last words implies the pain that he feels about the failed colonial friendship and the betrayal that he had. Aziz expresses his massive rejection through the metaphor of mother earth and the embodiment it; as if the whole world defies the friendship between Indian and English. Likewise, Stevenson (2007) views how the Indian landscape in the ending and throughout the novel is presented as inexpressible indifferent – vast and formless that it interrupts cohesive and coherence of human relation, enormous possibilities of order, morality and understanding (p. 216). Forster critical imagination not only presented through his depiction of Indian landscape as a trope of a failed human connection but also the mystery that surrounds it.

Forster constructs his orientalist fantasies through the representation of Marabar cave as the symbolic of muddle and mystery that surround the connection of English and Indian.

Forster weaves a complex colonial discourse where imperial pride of and prejudice of Indians reflect the problematic aspect of human connection in A Passage to India. Betrayal and grievance are the elements that constitute the friendship between Indian and the English, in particular Adela’s and Aziz’s connection. Aziz is keen on his friendship with Mrs. Moore but less interested in Adela as he dislikes the fact that she is going to be a memsahib – a wife of a official – which Hamidullah gives six months before they reveal their true colour. It is quite irony that Aziz is less interested with Adela for she is the fiancé of Ronny but extolling Mrs. Moore whom connection is deeper to Ronny as a mother compared to Adela.

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