

E.M. FORSTR'S IDEAS ON SYMBOLS AS PORTRAYED IN A PASSAGE TO INDIA

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ABSTRACT

A Passage to India (1924) was a great novel written by great novelist E.M. Forster. His works ignite criticisms of different views, among which individual relationships and the theme of separateness of fences and barriers are the main problems that the author always focuses on, which continues his previous style, Notably, it is a novel by E. M. Forster set against the backdrop of the British and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s. In a word, it is a novel of cultural, social, psychological, and religious conflict arising mainly from clashes between India's native population and British imperialist occupiers. the word 'symbol' stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something abstract. From the viewpoint of literary & literary critical terms, it indicates an object, person, idea, etc., used in a literary work, film, etc. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is painted with the colour of a wide range of symbols. They include; The Marabar Caves, the Image of the *Green Bird*, the *Wasp* Symbol, Social Events: Parties, Picnics, and Celebrations, Mosque, Cave, Temple, and Weather, the Infinite Sky, the *Pankhawallah* Image, the Snake Imagery, and the Collision of the Boats.

Key Words : Symbol, A Passage to India, E.M. Forster

ABSTRAK

A Passage To India (1924) adalah novel yang hebat yang ditulis oleh penulis yang hebat juga E.M. Forster. Karya-karyanya menitikberatkan pada perbedaan pandangan antara hubungan individu dan tema-tema penghalang perbedaan sebagai masalah-masalah utama, secara khusus, novel karya E.M. Forster ini mengadu domba latar belakang Orang Inggris dan Pergerakan Kemerdekaan Orang India tahun 1920, dan novel ini novel budaya, sosial, psikologi, dan konflik agama yang terjadi secara umum dari pertikaian antara orang pribumi India and penjajah orang Inggris. Kata 'symbol' bermakna sesuatu yang lain, suatu objek materi yang menjelaskan sesuatu yang abstrak, dari sudut pandang kesastraan dan istilah kritik sastra, menandakan suatu objek, orang, ide dan yang lain yang di pakai dalam suatu karya sastra, film,dll. Novel *A passage to India* karya E.M. Forster dilukiskan dengan warna suatu jarak yang lebar tentang symbol-simbol, yang terdiri dari ; Gua *Marabar*, Gambar dari *Burung Hijau*, symbol *Tabuhan*, Kejadian-kejadian social; Pesta, piknik, dan Perayaan, Masjid, Gua, Candi, dan Cuaca, langit luas, gambar *Pankhawallah*, Bayarangan Ular dan Tabrakan Perahu-Perahu.

Kata kunci : Simbol, A Passage to India, E.M.Forster

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Introduction

Forster is a distinguished novelist both in modern English and world literature history. All his life, his main achievements are six novels and two short story collections. His works ignite criticisms of different views, among which individual relationships and the theme of separateness, of fences and barriers are the main problems that the author always focuses on. After the author's two visits to India, the great novel *A Passage to India* (1924) was produced, which continues his previous style, i.e. probing the problem of personal relationship in a more complicated situation, and my article aims at having a comparatively deeper discussion about the crisis of human relationship in *A Passage to India*. Notably, it is a novel by E. M. Forster set against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s. In a word, it is a novel of cultural, social, psychological, and religious conflict arising mainly from clashes between India's native population and British imperialist occupiers. Altogether there are certain parts in this article highlighting on the author's philosophy, the imperialism, racialism and colonization in *A Passage to India* from the perspective of *symbolism*.

The Use of Symbolism in *A Passage to India*:

As far as the definition goes, generally, the word 'symbol' stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something

abstract- Middle English *symbole*, *creed*, from Old French, from Latin *symbolum*, 'token, mark', from Greek *symbolon*, 'token for identification' (*by comparison with a counterpart*). From the viewpoint of literary & literary critical terms, it indicates an object, person, idea, etc., used in a literary work, film, etc., to stand for or suggest something else with which it is associated either explicitly or in some more subtle way. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is painted with the colour of a wide range of symbols. They include-

1. The Marabar Caves
 - a. *The Reverberation of the Cave*
 - b. *The Echo Representing a Hindu Resonance*
2. The Image of the *Green Bird*
3. The Wasp Symbol
4. Social Events: Parties, Picnics, and Celebrations
5. Mosque, Cave, Temple, and Weather
6. Nothing as a Metaphor
7. The Infinite Sky
8. The Pankhawallah Image
9. The Snake Imagery
10. The Collision of the Boats

B. DISCUSSION

The Marabar Caves:

The imaginary caves in *A Passage to India* are modelled by E. M. Forster on actual caves about twelve miles from the city of Gaya in the state of Bihar. Nevertheless, the actual caves are known as the Barabar Caves, not the Marabar Caves

(Forster's fictional name for them). A Buddhist leader of the second century B.C, being liberal of other religions, ordered workers to cut the caves from rock faces as holy places for monks of the Ajivika religion. There are four Barabar caves. Their even inner walls maintain expanded echoes.

Forster's *A Passage to India* is intense with the type of symbolic language that we generally connect with poetry in spite of the deep political themes of the novel. Forster depicts the manifestation of a blaze (in one of the more amazing passages) against the extremely reflective shell of a Marabar cave:

"The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible." (2.12.4)

The Marabar Caves stand for all that is unfamiliar about natural world. The caves are older than anything else on the earth and represent emptiness and meaninglessness—a factual void in the earth. They disregard both English and Indians to act as guides to them, and their weird and wonderful attractiveness and hazard disturb tourists. The caves' strange feature also has the power to make tourists such as Mrs. Moore and Adela face parts of themselves or the cosmos that they have not formerly recognized. The all-reducing boom of

the caves causes Mrs. Moore to see the darker side of her mysticism—a declining promise to the world of relationships and a growing ambivalence about God. Adela faces the disgrace and humiliation of her understanding that she and Ronny are not in fact attracted to each other, and that she might be attracted to no one. In this sense, the caves both devastate meaning, in reducing all remarks to the same sound, and expose or describe the unspeakable, the aspects of the universe that the caves' visitors have not measured until now.

The Reverberation of the Cave

No matter what the sound is, e.g., sneezes, whistles, shouts, noise etc. return the equivalent echo in the first of the Marabar Caves: boum, or a variation of it such as *ou-boum*. This echo shows to ridicule the Hindu idea that the whole universe, and everything in it, consists of a particular spirit, *Brahman* (not to be confused with Brahmin or Brahma). Even the human soul, called *atman* by Hindus, is part of this spirit. Therefore, a whistle is a sneeze and a sneeze is a soul, since all are *Brahman*—that is, all are the same essence. The echo frightens Mrs. Moore because she unclearly realizes that it symbolizes a power that decreases everything to equality—a dull, bare sameness. Even biblical words that she had lived by become part of the *Brahman* and thus lose their meaning, as reported by the narrator in the last paragraph of Chapter 14. Mrs. Moore thinks about the cave-incident and tries to write a letter to her children, Stella and Ralph.

"[S]uddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from "Let there be Light" to "It is finished" only amounted to boum. Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul"

After that, her experience in the cave troubles her, and she becomes bad-tempered and sad. Her life and everything she believes in lose their meaning like the biblical words. India had charmed her when she arrived in the country but now it drives her back. Its interesting mystery has turned into the "muddle" spoken of by other Britons. No, she does not curse the country and its people as Major Calendar and Mrs. Turton do. Nor does she take Adela's side against Aziz in the days leading up to the trial. But, she can no longer tolerate India; it is too much for her. She decides to leave; she does not even wait to give evidence for Aziz.

"Why should I be in the witness box?"

she later says to her son Ronny.

"I have nothing to do with your ludicrous law courts."

The narrator then reports Heaslop's thoughts:

"She was by no means the dear old lady outsiders supposed, and India had brought her out in the open."

She is oppressed by the Asian heat, her health declines and she dies on the ship and becomes part of the huge barrenness of the Indian Ocean.

Adela Quested is captivated with India like Mrs. Moore when she

arrives in the country. But, she fears that its unrestrained variety will turn her into just another pessimistic, disappointed Anglo-Indian if she marries Ronny Heaslop and becomes an inhabitant of India. However, she sees a shine of optimism in Indian history, especially in the person of the Mogul emperor Akbar (1542-1605), who ruled from 1556 until his death. He set up modifications (to unite the common people) that centralized government functions. Furthermore, though he himself was a Muslim, he encouraged conversation between people of all religions—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, and so on—and even tried to begin a new religion that united parts of other religions.

Adela asks Aziz in Chapter 14 about Akbar, "[W]asn't Akbar's new religion very fine? It was to embrace the whole of India." Aziz answers by saying that Akbar was a great ruler and Akbar's plan of a particular Indian religion was incorrect.

"Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing, and that was Akbar's mistake."

Adela then says,

"I hope you're not right. There will have to be something universal in this country—I don't say religion, for I'm not religious, but something, or how else are barriers to be broken down."

She ends up saying that without a unifying power she would find it complicated as an Anglo-Indian to "avoid becoming like them [Mrs. Turton and Mrs. Callendar]."

Afterward, she enters one of the upper caves alone and scratches a wall and hears the echo. She later says that Aziz assaults her it is at this point. She struggles back with her field glasses, escapes the cave, races through a field of cactuses that tear her skin and insert needles in it, and returns to Chandrapore with Miss Derek. She is confused, in a state of fright. She frequently hears the echo after her recovery. But, she has no hint regarding its meaning unlike Mrs. Moore. When she asks the old woman what it means, Mrs. Moore replies,

"If you don't know, you don't know; I can't tell you."

She fails to understand the sound and becomes like the other English men and women who cannot understand Indians. She yet starts to question her own insightfulness and starts to recognize that she has wrongly blamed Aziz. But, Ronny and the others, who are using her as an tool to penalize the Indians, influence her that she was correct about Aziz. However, she gathers the bravery at the trial to confess that she was wrong and drops the charges. Then she leaves India too. The leaving of Miss Quested and Mrs. Moore predicts the historical British departure from India in 1947, which Forster may perhaps have seen as unavoidable.

The Echo Representing a Hindu Resonance

Certainly, the most unforgettable figure of speech in *A Passage to India* is onomatopoeia: the boum echo in the caves. It calls to

mind the *om* sound recited by Hindus and Buddhists. "Encyclopaedia Britannica" says about this sound,

"The syllable Om is composed of the three sounds a-u-m (in Sanskrit, the vowels a and u coalesce to become o), which represent several important triads: the three worlds of earth, atmosphere, and heaven; the three major Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva; and the three sacred Vedic scriptures, Rg, Yajur, and Sama. Thus, Om mystically embodies the essence of the entire universe. It is uttered at the beginning and end of Hindu prayers, chants, and meditation and is freely used in Buddhist and Jaina ritual also."

Different critics have explained the three sections in diverse manners. Gertrude M. White thinks that the splitting up of the novel into Mosque, Caves and Temple match with thesis, antithesis and synthesis of the Hegelian dialectics. However, G. D. Allen refuses her disagreement saying that the three sections stand for the ways of work of knowledge and of love (as specified in Hindu philosophy) as well as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. As said by Wilbur L. Cross, Forster has attempted to portray "the native as he appears to himself, as he appears to the British official and as he really is when his mind is revealed, presenting a civilization which the West can disturb but will never acquire." Whereas R. A. Brower is of the view that "the communication between Britons and Indians, are more generally the possibility of understanding

relationships between say two persons."

However, most of these explanations are half-done and fall short to realize Forster's fundamental purpose. The fact is that the three sections symbolize the three stages of man's spiritual expedition. Forster had promoted the relationship of the seen and the unseen in *Howards End* and he observes the dissimilar ways in which this association can be best recognized. The unnoticed has an influence on the social, spiritual, and emotional lives of the people and Forster looks for establishing the way in which this influence is maintained best.

The Image of the Green Bird:

Both Adela and Ronny agree for the first time (in Chapter VII) to end their engagement; suddenly, they see a green bird sitting in the tree above them. However, they are totally unable to identify the bird. Adela thinks that the bird represents the unidentifiable feature of all of India: just when she thinks she can realize any feature of India, that characteristic alters or vanishes. In this sense, the green bird represents the muddle of India. The bird, in another capacity, indicates an unusual anxiety between the English and Indians. The English are preoccupied with knowledge, literalness, and naming, and they use these devices as a means of gaining and maintaining supremacy. In contrast, the Indians are more thoughtful about nuance, undertone, and the feelings behind words. The Indians identify that tags can blind one to significant facts and

differences whereas the English demand for cataloging stuffs. The unidentifiable green bird proposes the inappropriateness of the English mania with categorization and order with the shifting value of India itself; actually the land is a *hundred Indias* that disregard tagging and understanding.

The Wasp Symbol:

The wasp becomes visible a number of times in *A Passage to India*, generally along with the Hindu idea of the oneness of all living things. The wasp is generally represented as the lowest creature the Hindus integrate into their idea of widespread unity. Mrs. Moore is intimately associated with the wasp, as she finds one in her room and becomes thankful of it. Her quiet regard for the wasp shows her own candidness to the Hindu idea of collectivity, and to the mysticism and indescribable excellence of India overall. Nevertheless, the wasp also symbolizes the limits of the Hindu vision as the wasp is the lowest creature that the Hindus think about. The vision is not a cure-all, but only a prospect for harmony and understanding in India.

Social Events; Parties, Picnics, and Celebrations:

A number of bad parties appear in *A Passage to India*; we witness parties such as, the Turtons' *Bridge Party*, Fielding's *tea party*, and Aziz's *picnic*. All of these events become terribly unsuccessful. Generally, these disastrous parties

function as images for the British Empire in the book.

The novel presents that each of these events go in vain because of the British need for exclusion, for hierarchies, for societal restrictions, and for setting up an *us-versus-them* that eternally constructs an *us* as better than *them*. Racial discrimination is an addition of this wish for segregation, and empire is also no exception to it, which is based on the standard that *we* are superior, more educated, more up to date, more dominant than *them*. Aziz's misfortune of a picnic is just a fabulous example of how vicious the British longing for segregation can be. Nevertheless, this longing for segregation is not limited to the British single-handedly. The book unlocks as Mohurram, a Muslim celebration, advances. The Mohurram riots were connected with manifestations in favor of Aziz for the duration of the trial. Nonetheless, prior to the trial, the Mohurram problems referred to the unavoidable twists between the Muslims and the Hindus regarding the procession direction. The Mohurram riots are an metaphor for the religious factionalism that continues to terrorize the South Asian subcontinent even today. Contrary to these failed social occasions, let us take a quick look at the Gokul Ashtami fiesta, which is a celebration *set up* to fail. The event rejoices all beings, exclusive of not a soul and nothing, not even the smallest of insects or the silliest of jokes; Godbole remembers Mrs. Moore (back in Chandrapore) and a wasp; he does not get in touch

with some elevated command in his spiritual trance.

Mosque, Cave, Temple, and Weather:

E.M. Forster divided the novel not simply into chapters, but it is also separated into three parts entitled "Mosque," "Cave," and "Temple." The parts are also ordered by the three seasons in India:

- a) "Mosque" takes place during the cool weather,
- b) "Cave" during the hot weather, and
- c) "Temple" during the rainy season.

These part divisions situate the tone for the events described in each part. The first part of the novel, in "Mosque," Aziz's indication to the architecture of the mosque as that of "call and response" synchronizes with the common mood of this part of the novel, where people are meeting each other at different societal functions. People are normally peaceful and open like the cold weather.

On the contrary, the climax of the novel is found in the "Cave" section of the novel. Taking place during the hot weather, feelings are irritated, and nobody seems to be able to think quietly and logically. The whole population of Chandrapore is turned wrong way up as riots and disorder encircle the trial just as Mrs. Moore's grip on life was in danger by her knowledge of emptiness inside the cave.

Lastly, the "Temple" part tries to sweep away the confusion of the "Cave" section with its torrential rains. The chapter rejoices the Hindu belief of the oneness of all things with Godbole at the Gokul Ashtami celebration in relation to the Hindu motif of the temple, and provides us with a shaky understanding between Fielding and Aziz.

Nothing as a Metaphor:

Nothing in the novel is in fact something in a twist that Godbole would surely be pleased about- it is a symbol *nothing*. The novel starts with the word "nothing" in its first sentence. You might have observed that the novel appears gripped with breaches and cracks. The novel is almost planned like a donut, with a large hole where Adela's experience in the cave should be. But, if you think about it, even though nothing is written about Adela's understanding in the cave, it does not indicate that nothing happened or that nothing can be said. Actually, it is perhaps the most remarkable part of the book exactly for the reason that it is omitted. As the narrator comments that the Marabar Caves are *extraordinary*. The extraordinariness of nothing is definitely one of the stranger and surely forceful motifs in the novel.

The Infinite Sky as a Vital Symbol:

The reappearance of the infinite sky above is not meaningless. The author has intentionally done so with a view to presenting a deeper meaning through it. It happens in the successive chapters and its

descriptions seem to be lively characters to us. It goes without saying that the sky is so limitless that it holds all things together and could be interpreted as a symbol of inclusiveness, but it also represents the huge area of either British colonial control or the unimaginable hugeness of India itself, to a great extent.

The Pankhwallah Image:

This unimportant lowborn labourer is luckily awarded with power and attractiveness. He is not aware whatsoever how far he fits into the society where he toils involuntarily for a meager amount so as to maintain himself and almost certainly a family. He does not recognize the seriousness of the emergency that has disturbed the people who had crowded encircling him in the court room. This detachment of the modest labourer has struck a blow at the small-minded working of her delirium-shrouded brain and provoked a kind of goodness of thinking in Adela. As a result, her viewpoint and vision turns out to be widened.

The Snake Imagery

George H. Thomson wrote a scholarly article about the snake symbol prevalent in *A Passage to India*; the very article appeared in "English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920". According to him, the novel pivots on the mighty contrast between two settings: the wasteland world of 'Caves' and the rain soaked jungle world of 'Temple'. The wasteland world, at the centre of which is the Marabar Hills and caves,

signifies the absence of God and indicates his nonexistence. The jungle world, at the centre of which is Mau and its great religious festival, signifies the presence of God. This theme of presence and absence of God, adumbrated in the novel by Godbole and reflected in the major symbols, is reinforced by a variety of minor symbols.

The significance of snakes and images of snakes in the novel will illustrate Forster's careful deployment of such minor symbols. But, in assessing the snake imagery in relation to the presence and absence of God, it is important to remember that the development of this theme is in many respects, non-theological. The idea of presence and absence is generalized and finds expression in the quality and nature of the reality-unreality encountered in the Indian universe.

Near the close of the novel, Aziz and Fielding go for a ride in the Mau jungle. As they near the end of their ride, we read:

"They splashed through butterflies and frogs; great trees with leaves like plates rose among the brushwood. The divisions of daily life were returning, the shrine had almost shut" (p.321).

For Aziz and Fielding, who have come together in the closing gestures of the Mau festival, the god has extended his temple even to the Mau jungle. This is important in evaluating a detail mentioned earlier in their ride:

"Presently, the ground opened into full sunlight and they saw a grassy slope bright with butterflies, also a cobra, which crawled across doing nothing in particular, and disappeared among some custard apple trees" (p. 317).

This is the first actual snake to appear in the novel. With two trivial exceptions, it is also the first real snake to be mentioned in a novel well-furnished with references to snakes, scorpions, serpents, and dragons. The exceptions are the snake said to have been cut in two by the kitchen boy and the highly poisonous Russell's Viper said to have been found in a classroom at Government College. The first is a casual illustration of the superstitions of the uneducated Indian, the second is an illustration of the absence of order and reasonable probability in the world of 'Caves'. Apart from these, all the snakes, serpents, and monsters are nonexistent.

At the beginning of the story, Aziz—as an afterthought—mentions to Mrs. Moore the dangers of snakes from the Marabar. The context suggests that Aziz is improvising these snakes to suit his feeling of the moment (p. 21). As it turns out, however, the Marabar is a rich source of snake images if not of actual snakes.

As the expedition to the Marabar Hills gets under way, the country is "invisible except as a dark movement in the darkness," and in the sky "the stars of the sprawling Scorpion had begun to pale" (p. 132). Later, perched on the elephant, Adela

sees a snake; a black cobra, explains Aziz. But, Ronny's binoculars, the symbol of the inquiring intellect, reveal to Adela the twisted stump of a toddy-palm (p. 141). Inside the cave,

"the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling... the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently" (pp. 147-148).

Whatever is said in the cave, the comment is always the same 'ou-boum', and the serpent descends and returns to the ceiling (pp. 149-150). After Aziz has lost himself among the caves, he finds the place full of grooves that lead "this way and that like snake-tracks" (p.154), and the expedition leaving the Marabar unwinds out of the corridor (p. 159).

The Collision of the Boats:

The occupants (Ralph, Stella, and Fielding) get wet when the boats smash together close to the floating image of the Lord. This getting soaked has figurative importance that in spite of all endeavour, in spite of mosques, caves, temples, and the holy soil of the very old land of India, the diverse cultural units cannot be included into a particular logical part.

C. CONCLUSION

In the end, the novel helps us to see how the flickers disclose the

strange shades of colour refracted off the minerals in the stone to bring the frozen, hard stone to *evanescent life*.

Forster's writing style serves one of the familiar ideas of the novel : art is a way of giving shape to the *muddle*, of helping us make sense of the world around us. The best works of art use *form* not to remove the muddle, but to hold it close, to direct the readers' attention for eternity away from the undisturbed protection of the *familiar*, to the *unknown* and *strange*.

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