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## **Cultural Hegemony and Imperialism in E M Forster's, "A Passage to India"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*E M Forster's "A passage To India" is a realistic novel and his master piece about observation of colonial India, the British Raj, the power dominance and its consequences on the various relationship established in this novel. This paper aims to explore the meeting of different cultures under reign of imperialism and the gulf of*

*thinking which is prejudiced by racial superiority. It also represents dominating situation of communal hatred and tension which he has experienced in India and Forester's efforts to bridge the gap between the Britishers and the Indians.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*Culture, hegemony, imperialism, colonialism and the British Raj.*

## RESEARCH PAPER

### ***Introduction:***

The term ***cultural hegemony*** derives from the Ancient Greek word *hegemonia* which indicates the leadership. Its meaning is controlling power or influence over others. In political science, hegemony is the geopolitical dominance exercised by an empire. The leader state rules the subordinate states by the threat of intervention and an implied means of power. In Marxist philosophy, cultural hegemony is the dominance of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who shape the culture of that society the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, values, and mores so that the worldview of the ruling class becomes the accepted cultural norm.

The term ***cultural imperialism*** refers largely to the exercise of power in a cultural relationship in which the principles, ideas, practices, and values of a powerful, invading society are imposed upon indigenous cultures in the occupied areas. The process is also present when powerful nations are able to flood the information and media space with their ideas, limiting countries and communities' ability to compete and expose people to locally created content. The word "imperialism" describes practices in which a country engages culture to create and maintain unequal social and economic relationships among social groups. Cultural imperialism often uses wealth, media power and violence to implement the system of cultural hegemony that legitimizes imperialism.

E M Forster is the leading novelist in Edwardian tradition of English novels. He is the great humanist and believed in the friendship rather than blood relations around the world. His novels represent the human relationship and friendship on equal grounds. Cultural diversity and power dominance is the central issues in his novels. ***A Passage to India*** is the fifth novel published in 1924. It was the result of his frequent visit to India. The novel is about the British imperialism and the bad situation of the ruled class of India. Forster delineated the rigid caste system and socio-cultural environment in India during the British Raj. Forster uses the little village of Chandrapore as the backdrop to depict British-ruled India in his story. The communities residing in Chandrapore city lack religious, political, and social equality. In England, both men and women see the Indians as belonging to a lower social class. The Indians

feel antipathy for the English, who use force to govern them. Both Muslims and Hindus now exist in an atmosphere characterized by mutual distrust and misconceptions. Muslims consider themselves to be superior to Hindus, whom their ancestors reigned over for many years.

E.M. Forster has clearly depicted the differences between Hindus and Muslims. He observes that, despite the fact that Hindus and Muslims are still subject to the yoke of slavery under British rule, they cannot participate on the same basis. They both want democracy, but they disagree on transfer of power by the rulers. They never try to fight together openly because of their different mind-set. Dr. Aziz the protagonist of the novel longs for his Afghan forefathers to overtake and rule India. He hopes that Hindus won't remind him of cow excrement in his future interactions with other races. Mr. Das thinks that some Muslims are violent. Aziz harshly criticises claiming that Hindus are untrustworthy and filthy on Mr. Bhattacharya's failure to dispatch his carriage to transport Mrs Moore and Miss Adela Quested. He believes that Bhattacharya did not send the carriage because he does not want the English ladies to see their disgusting home. Godbole, despite being a philosophy professor, cannot imagine anybody eating beef because of his superstitions. Forster minutely observed the gaps between the Hindus and the Muslim communities and their culture.

The novel opens by the visit of two British ladies from England Mrs Moore and Adela Quested. Before Adela's engagement to Ronny Heaslop, they intended to see the actual India. Ronny was British official from England and behaved very cruelly with the local Indians. Forster portrayed him as the typical product of English school system and the bureaucracy. A bridge party was arranged to welcome the ladies and the intention was to make them acquainted with the Indians but it was gone into failure because of the wide cultural gap between the Indians and the British rulers. Forster reveals the cultural divergence between the British and the Indians through the incident of "The Bridge Party". The Bridge Party is organised for Mrs Moore and Adela Quested, newcomers who are eager to experience real India. Mr. Turton extends invitations to several distinguished Indian gentlemen to partake in the Bridge Party at the club. No Indian of lower rank has sent an invitation. The reputed Indians are taken aback by the proposal. The sudden invitation leaves them perplexed. During the Bridge Party, the Indian guests remain sedentary and uninterested on one side of the tennis court, while the English people occupy a separate side. Adela saw an unprecedented level of detachment in the social gathering. She surprises and inquires to Ronny:

“This party to-day makes me so angry and miserable. I think my countrymen out here must be mad. Fancy inviting guests and not treating them properly! ... The Englishmen had intended to play up better, but had been prevented from doing so by their women folk, whom they had to attend, provide with tea, advice about dogs, etc. When tennis began, the barrier grew impenetrable. It had been hoped to have some sets between East and West, but this was forgotten, and the courts were monopolized by the usual club couples.” (A Passage to India, 42)

The main goal of the party setup is for everyone to exchange ideas and comprehend one another as fellow human beings. Adela Quested and Mrs Moore are taken aback by the apparent division. The dress worn by the Indians, which blends Eastern and Western designs, is mocked by Ronny and Mrs Turton. It is only when her husband begs her to see the Indian ladies that Mrs Turton agrees to go. The collector's wife brashly says that the Indians need to be made to crawl on their knees from the city to the caves as a kind of punishment for their servitude. Several Englishwomen in the group discuss historical romances instead of developing a strong bond with the Indians. The English use of "they" when referring to Indians demonstrates once again that the English see Indians as a group rather than as individuals. The purpose of the bridge party is to try to close the cultural divide, but it only becomes bigger. English colonisers' emissaries, Mr. and Mrs Turton, Major Calendar, and city magistrate Ronny Heaslop, symbolise their strategy of dominating India. Ronny's traditional and bigoted attitudes against Indians surprise Mrs Moore when he says:

*“We’re not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!*

*What do you mean?*

*What I say. We’re out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them’s my sentiments. India isn’t a drawing room. Your 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.”( A Passage to India, 43 )*

He feels proud to say that the English rulers in India are under no obligation to treat the natives in kind manner. It was their duty to keep and maintain the law and order. These disparaging

comments show a profound contempt for Indian society and culture by the British rulers. He is the typical product of British Colonialism who has strong hatred and prejudice which is understood by the following comment by him:

“I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I’m not a missionary or a Labour Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I’m just a servant of the Government; it’s the profession you wanted me to choose myself, and that’s that. We’re not pleasant in India, and we don’t intend to be pleasant. We’ve something more important to do.”(A Passage to India, 44)

His own observations make it clear that he is instructed and told not to show sympathy, compassion, or respect for the oppressed Indians. Rule is the tactic used by oppressors to establish a firm grip on the nation. This tactic sows dissatisfaction across the populace and ultimately sparks hostilities between these two countries.

Mrs Moore fascinated by India’s beauty and mysteriousness. She visited Mosque where she introduced Dr. Aziz. Dr. Aziz arranged a trip for Marabar Caves along with British friend Cyril Fielding and others for Mrs Moore and Adela. The tour for the Marabar Caves proved calamity for Dr. Aziz which changed the whole atmosphere of the novel. Adela hallucinated by the vast and mysterious atmosphere of the caves and became restless. Her illusion in the cave renders any effort to comprehend the real India futile. Adela accused Dr. Aziz for the charge of trying to rape her while she was in trance. The English community forced her to file a case against him. Tension between the two races increased. Indians are treated with rudeness and inferiority by the British. The scenario became more heated due to the racial flavour that Hamidullah's participation in this matter brought to it. Because of their influence over the courts, Indians have mistrust for the British judicial system. Nawab Bahadur criticises the British for their insensitivity and their inconsistent words about Indians during Dr. Aziz's trial. Indians come together in favour of Dr. Aziz; because they think that Dr. Aziz has been wrongly accused. In the sense of discontentment with the British authorities Aziz said:

“India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Muslim and Sikh and all shall be one!”(A Passage to India, 45)

Besides Fielding, all of the Englishmen are sure that Dr. Aziz is guilty, and they want him to be locked up. At the beginning of the trial day, English community members walked Adela to the courtroom. They are sure to win the case. A Z chair to Adela has been provided on the stage while the Indian sat below the stage on the chairs. Every other Englishman also walks up and sits down on the stage, acting like they are the in charge of the case. The lawyers for the accused, Mahmoud Ali and Amrit Rao, don't like how the English men are sitting on the stage. They complained to the judge about the disparity and unauthorised behaviour of the English community. The court agreed and orders them to sit in common people below the stage. After much argument of both the sides in the court trial Dr. Aziz own the case and he is released from all the allegations. Indians overjoyed while Britishers disappointed.

Forster also discusses the significant problem of the friendship between Dr. Aziz and Cyril Fielding. During the British Raj, no such friendships had ever been developed. The basis of their relationship relies on the principle of equality between Indians and Englishmen. Fielding has a wide range of experiences and learning. He assesses people based on their own qualities. He has high intellect, exhibits kindness, and demonstrates unwavering commitment to aiding others who are particularly affected by adverse circumstances. His connection with Dr. Aziz blossomed due to his exceptional moral character and unwavering loyalty. He has a more expansive perspective on the nature of humanity. Both individuals engage in discussions on a range of philosophical matters that ultimately agreed on the concept of human equality. Despite their divergent religious and cultural backgrounds, they always refrain from demeaning one another. Dr. Aziz is facing allegations of rape by Adela, who claims it occurred during a hallucination. In this particular situation, Fielding chooses to side with Aziz, even if their community is opposed to him. The reason he protects Aziz is not due to his Indian nationality, but rather because he believes Aziz is innocent. After Adela admitted her mistake during the trial and Dr. Aziz was found not guilty in all matters. But Dr. Aziz changed by this situation. His perspective for the British people changed after enduring humiliation and blasphemy. Along with Fielding, he became suspicious about the colonisers. He harbours scepticism over the connection between Adela and Fielding. The Anglo-Indian connection cannot be solely sustained by the friendship between a local Indian and an Englishman.

At end of the novel, Aziz happens to meet Fielding during the festival of Lord Krishna's Birthday, one of the Hindu Festival celebrated in India. There is no happy interaction between

the two Friends as they have before. Dr Aziz has been transformed totally because of the false accusation by the British lady and the Britishers stand with her even try to unknowing the truth. Fielding also helped and stayed with her. But he becomes somewhat normal when he realises that Fielding marry with Stella, Mrs Moore's Daughter and not with Adela who accused him for the rape. Aziz and Fielding begin to discuss politics openly and closely. They understand that their personalities and ways of life have radically changed to be continuing as friends. They both are indignant and eager. They have never really been warmer, and they speak as if they are Englishman and Indian less than Fielding and Aziz. Aziz continues to shout, Fielding makes fun of him, which enrages Aziz. They put their horses closer together to hug, but the horses turn in opposite directions. As a result, their relationship is only transitory, as orthodox India is hostile to inter-racial relationships. Forster explains that this not only the separation of the two person but it is the dissociation of the two major parts of the world; it is the partition of East and West.

“Why can't we be friends now?” said the other, holding him affectionately. “It's what I want. It's what you want. But the horses 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... they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet,” and the sky said, “No, not there.”(A Passage to India, 46)

Forster revealed the clash of Indians for Britishers. He explore that if there is doubt in the mind no friendship could be developed. Though Dr Aziz and Fielding both have good qualities and generosity, only these qualities are not enough to stay remain close for ever culturally. It must have sociocultural equalities. The misunderstanding and exploitation of the Britishers had a significant impact on their friendship.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, in *A Passage to India*, Forster reveals communal tension in many ways in the different scenes like, *The Mosque*, *The Cave*, *The Bridge Party* and *The Temple*. In every incident, the Indians and the Britishers whenever they confront together Forster shows that the culture and tradition is the main barrier. No friendly relations can be establish between ruled and rulers classes. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* explores the conflicts and cultural dominance. As well as the difference between the language, clothes, clothing, cuisine,

education, religion, and mind-set of the British and Indian people. He tries to show that every culture is unique and it has their self-different ideologies.

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