

# Empire, imperialism and Literature

- **Literature and society**. Is there always a relationship?

There is always this attitude that literature is reflective of the society in which it is produced. yet, this implies reducing literature to mere records of historical events. This also implies that a literary work cannot be appreciated fully without knowledge of the relevant outside environment. Literary devices are also marginalized as the focus is on the message that this literary work foregrounds.

**On the other hand**, there is the extreme position which tries to separate literature from its historical context with the aim of directing readers/critics' attention to the form of the text and to reading the text as an independent entity. [New criticism, Russian formalism, Roland Barthes' *The death of the author*]

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- Throughout history, there have been many empires: the Spanish empire, the Roman empire, the Indian empire, etc.
- Empire implies that one State controls others not only politically, but also culturally and economically. Natural resources of colonized nations are exploited. Colonized people are subdued by all means of oppression. Colonized people are driven into the belief that they take part into ruling the state. This is to enforce the illusion that empire will last for ever.

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- In India, the British ruled with extreme power [autocratic government], though in some parts Indian princes ruled in an Indian way, not British.
- The idea of an Indian empire was emphasized when Queen Victoria proclaimed herself empress of India.

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- Empire implies also the spread of the culture of the colonial power in the colonies.
- The field of education where English literature was inserted played an active role in the process.
- The notion of the superiority of the dominant culture was transmitted into literary texts to the extent that indigenous people believed the notion and started to deal with the new imposed culture with reverence and respect passing this tendency from generation to another.
- Native culture was regarded as savage, inferior and debased [**inferiority complex**].

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- Indian scholars, in effect, head for Cambridge and Oxford, for more knowledge. Sons of loyal Indian people were allowed to attend British public schools.

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- **Empire vs. Imperialism:**
- Empire refers to a set of territories governed by an emperor.
- Imperialism, however, is much broader as it refers to and describes the attitudes of the rulers.
- Empire might come to an end by the declaration of independence of the colonized states.
- Imperialism might live longer even after the end of political colonization

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- Imperialistic tendencies might include the spread of the language of the colonizer, the system of education, the manner of dressing, eating, celebrating, socializing, reading books, buildings architecture etc. Imperialistic thinking depends on the assumption of the superiority of the culture of the colonizer.
- Imperialistic thinking presents itself in terms of paternal and patriarchal terms. Colonized people are in consequence feminized, docile and obedient.

# Empire, imperialism and Literature contd.

- HOW DOES FORESTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* REFLECT THESE ATTITUDES? [impossibility of friendship]
- HOW DOES KIPLING'S *A SAHIBS'S WAR* REFLECT THESE ATTITUDES? [the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized]
- HOW DOES KIPLING'S *THE BURDEN OF THE WHITE MAN* REFLECT THESE ATTITUDES? [imperialism is a burden for one receives no words of thanks]

# Reading the text

- E.M. Forester's *A Passage to India* (1924) should now be read in the light of its representation of the ideologies of Imperialism.
- Try to think of what is repressed or smoothed over in the text. For example, in Kipling's poem, the statement 'the white's man burden' represses the fact that the white man is the burden; it also represses a long history of exploitation and oppression...

# A Passage to India

- What is main theme of that novel?
- How is that theme presented in the novel?
- Does the form of the novel reflect that theme?
- Can the novel be read in the light of Edward said' project in his book Orientalism?
- How are race and gender discussed in the novel?

# Theme of the novel

- *A Passage to India* begins and ends by posing the question of whether it is possible for an Englishman and an Indian to ever be friends, at least within the context of British colonialism.
- Forster uses this question as a framework to explore the general issue of Britain's political control of India on a more personal level, through the friendship between Aziz and Fielding.
- At the beginning of the novel, Aziz is scornful of the English, wishing only to consider them comically or ignore them completely. Yet the intuitive connection

# Theme of the novel

Aziz feels with Mrs. Moore in the mosque opens him to the possibility of friendship with Fielding.

Through the first half of the novel, Fielding and Aziz represent a positive model of **liberal humanism**:

Forster suggests that British rule in India could be successful and respectful if only English and Indians treated each other as Fielding and Aziz treat each other—as **worthy individuals** who connect through frankness, intelligence, and good will.

# Theme of the novel

Yet in the aftermath of the novel's **climax—Adela's accusation that Aziz attempted to assault her** and her subsequent disavowal of this accusation at the trial—Aziz and Fielding's friendship falls apart.

The strains on their relationship are external in nature, as Aziz and Fielding both suffer from the tendencies of their cultures.

Aziz tends to let his imagination run away with him and to let suspicion harden into a grudge. Fielding suffers from an English literalism and

# Theme of the novel

rationalism that blind him to Aziz's true feelings and make Fielding too stilted to reach out to Aziz through conversations or letters.

Furthermore, their respective Indian and English communities pull them apart through their mutual stereotyping.

As we see at the end of the novel, even the **landscape of India seems to oppress their friendship.**

Forster's final vision of the possibility of English-Indian friendship is a pessimistic one, yet it is qualified by the possibility of friendship on English soil, or after the liberation of India. As the landscape itself seems to imply at the end of the novel, such a friendship may be possible eventually, but **"not yet."**

# Theme of the novel

- For all Forster's criticism of the British manner of governing India, however, he does not appear to **question the right of the British Empire to rule India.**
- He suggests that the British would be well served by becoming kinder and more sympathetic to the Indians with whom they live, but he does not suggest that the British should abandon India outright. Even this lesser critique is never overtly stated in the novel, but implied through biting satire.

# A Passage to India:

## An overview

- Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* examines the racial misunderstandings and cultural hypocrisies that characterized the complex interactions between Indians and the English toward the end of the British occupation of India.
- Forster's style is marked by his sympathy for his characters, his ability to see more than one side of an argument or story, and his fondness for simple, symbolic tales that neatly encapsulate large-scale problems and conditions. These tendencies are all evident in *A Passage to India*, which was immediately acclaimed as Forster's masterpiece upon its publication.

# A Passage to India:

## An overview

- It is a traditional social and political novel, unconcerned with the technical innovation of some of Forster's modernist contemporaries such as Gertrude Stein or T.S. Eliot. *A Passage to India* is concerned, however, with representing the chaos of modern human experience through patterns of imagery and form.
- In this regard, Forster's novel is similar to modernist works of the same time period, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).
- In the *passage*, the hills and the caves are carriers of the novel's deep significance and are one major source of its aesthetic unity.

# A Passage to India:

## An overview

- The prevailing attitude among the British in India was that the colonists were assuming the “white man’s burden”—novelist Rudyard Kipling’s phrase—of governing the country, because the Indians could not handle the responsibility themselves.
- Forster, a homosexual living in a society and era largely unsympathetic to his lifestyle, had long experienced prejudice and misunderstanding firsthand.
- It is no surprise, then, that Forster felt sympathetic toward the Indian side of the colonial argument.
- Indeed, Forster became a lifelong advocate of tolerance and understanding among people of different social classes, races, and backgrounds.

# The novel and imperialism

- How is the novel reflective of the theme of the block, imperialism?
- The setting of the novel makes it clear from the very beginning that it is about imperialism. The location of action is India.
- The details of that setting is also suggestive of the imperial force in India. the city of Chandrapore is geographically divided into low and high areas. low areas are inhabited by Indians; high, by British people. (the novel, 5-6).

# The novel and imperialism

- The British buildings and the rest of Chandrapore are connected only by the Indian sky.
- The sky dominates the whole landscape, except for the Marabar Hills, which contain the only extraordinary part of Chandrapore—the Marabar Caves.
- Chandrapore is presented as mean, dirty, small, muddy and so abased, and so are the inhabitants.

# The novel and imperialism contd.

- That location is also suggestive of the separation between the world of the rulers and that of the ruled. The area of the ruler is planned, that of the ruled is mean , monotonous, and ugly.
- The division of the setting is visibly mimicking the division between the races and impossibility of mutual understanding.
- It should be noted that the two worlds are alien to each other. Various incidents in the novel support this claim... (give examples to elaborate on this point . Pp.38-39). How does Aziz feel when he enters the British civil lines? a sense of melancholy.

# The novel and imperialism contd.

- How is Aziz presented at the beginning of the novel? The bicycle puncture incident is depicting the gap between Indian life and that of the colonists whose servants attend to all small inconveniences of life
- The rulers living in the civil station, on the high area, become able to screen what passes below; superior-inferior relationship is foregrounded here.
- The description of the English buildings, which lie some distance from the city and sit on higher ground, implies that the English intend to remain disconnected from the Indians and that they feel the need to monitor Indian activity.

# The novel and imperialism contd

- The details of the setting give a signal that the novelist is presenting imperialism in crisis rather than at the height of its power and confidence. In other words, imperialism is presented as a burden.
- It should be noticed here that Forester is **proleptic** in his manner of narration; a mass of expectation is created of what might follow. He is reluctant to give us, by means of **analepsis**, any background about past events.

# Division of the novel

- Forster divides *A Passage to India* into three parts: “Mosque,” “Cave,” and “Temple.”
- What does each part signify?

# The mosque

- The encounter between Aziz and Mrs. Moore in the mosque stands out as the only successful interaction between an Indian and an English person in these opening chapters. The meeting is notable because Aziz and Mrs. Moore ultimately treat each other as equals and speak frankly as friends.
- Aziz recognizes in Mrs. Moore an ability to sense whom she likes and dislikes without the help of labels. From this interaction comes the title of the first part of the novel, “Mosque.”

# The mosque

- The correlation between the episode and the title suggests that Part I will focus on similar fleeting moments of friendship and attunement between the two cultures.

# The cave

- Part II begins with a chapter-long description of the Marabar Hills and the caves. These descriptions set the tenor of the section to come; here, the narrative emphasizes the hills' alien quality of primitiveness and nothingness.
- The caves and the hills in which they are located predate all things known to humanity, including language and religion.

# The cave

- The hills are described as “**unspeakable**”—an ambiguous term that not only connotes the hills’ location outside time and human history, but also implies that they are a sort of desecration of the landscape.
- Indeed, the hills are distinctly nonhuman and seem to embody a physical nothingness. Forster uses the phrase “**nothing, nothing**” twice in the opening chapter, and we see that the word “nothing” recurs numerous times throughout Part II.

# The cave

- This focus on absence, or lack, combined with the menacing, primal setting of the Marabar Hills, sets an appropriate tone for Part II, in which the personal relations built up in Part I fall apart.
- In Part II, individual characters become isolated, confused, and sensitive to an eternal force just outside their comprehension—a force of nothingness and emptiness that is embodied in the Marabar Caves.

# The temple

- Part III takes Hinduism as its backdrop, suggesting just what Fielding has implied—that in Hinduism may lie the mysterious remedy to cultural and individual conflict.
- The emphasis on rebirth in Part III reinforces and deepens this sense of optimism. The Hindu celebration that provides the backdrop of the section is a celebration of the birth of the god Krishna.

# The temple

- Furthermore, Part III takes place at the beginning of the rainy season, the time after the blistering hot season that brings extraordinary rains to nurture new crops.
- Aziz himself can be seen as a manifestation of rebirth, as his children are now living with him, and he seems to be focused on their education and upbringing. All of Aziz's hopes for a new India are invested in this younger generation.

# The novel and Orientalism

- In his book, Orientalism [*Rising sun, East*], Edward Said, the Palestinian scholar, literary critic and political activist, examines the work of Western writers about the orient.
- Said's focus is on the Middle East, so **A Passage to India** is not given much attention. Nevertheless, Said's investigation into the matter has a great bearing on understanding Forester's novel.
- In fact Said's work provides alternative deconstructive ways of reading the novel.

# Orientalism: three definitions

#An academic study of the orient: any one who teaches, writes about or researches into the Orient is an orientalist, and what he produces is Orientalism.

#the second definition centers on the imaginative conception of the Orient; Orientalism is thus a style of thought based on the distinction between the the “orient’ and “the occident”. It is a way of thinking , manifest in all kinds of writings seeking to highlight the difference between the East and the West.

# Three definitions continued

#the third definition which Said's book is concerned with, relates to the historical reproduction of the East;

the corporal institution for dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.

It is a Western style for domination, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.

# The novel and Orientalism

- In using the term Orientalism, Said contrasts it to the Occident. The Occident is thus a reference to whatever of a Western origin.
- In Said's line of analysis, Orientalism focuses on how the East has been dealt with by Westerners; how it has been produced, conceived, described for the sake of dominating and controlling it.
- It is a Western style of having an authority, politically and economically, over the East.

# The novel and Orientalism

- Orientalism is this a discourse of power directed towards the East for the consumption of the Western viewer, reader and scholar. It is in this sense that the East is described as the Other, as alien, a way of humiliating and degrading it.
- The West uses the discourse of Orientalism to define its identity based on the assumption that the East is a negative image that the West is the opposite to.
- The East is projected as the site of beauty, fantasy, imagination, passivity, lust, silence, weakness, inability for self-caring; it is then feminized in front of the masculine West that is more powerful, dominant, and manipulative.

# The novel and Orientalism

- Orientalism is thus a way of representation, and not a geographical entity; it is an idea that has history , tradition of thought, imagery and language that may and may not have a corresponding reality.
- The West is always superior to an inferior East that in any relationship the West is privileged to have the upper hand.
- The West created that myth, believed it and, which is worse made the Easterners believe in it; it is a colonialism of the imagination.

# The novel and Orientalism

- How far could these images be applied in Kipling's *A Sahib's War*?
- *A Passage to India* was meant by its author to be a bridge between two alien cultures. How far could the novel succeed in so doing?
- How are the issues of representation and power be traced in *A Passage*?

# The novel and Orientalism

- In terms of representation: language used to describe the setting in India, ch.1,
- Characters delineation, men and women can you think of any stereotyping. Accusing Aziz of sexual assault,
- The notion of India as a muddle. How do you find that in the light of the hegemonic discourse characteristic of Orientalism?