Somjyoti Mridha

# "...and the Twentieth Century Took Over from the Sixteenth": Literary Modernism and the Colonial World in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

**Abstract:** A *Passage to India* (1924) by E. M. Forster is a significant modernist novel and emerged as a benchmark for representing the colonial world. The novel is simultaneously embedded within the "ideologies of the Raj" and orientalist framework mediated with modernist ethos that determined the dynamics of representation. Forster challenges the certitudes of empire building and utilitarian values of Victorian and Edwardian England in crucial ways. This paper interrogates the contradictions in Forster's literary aesthetic of modernism and political ideology of imperialism. This paper also explores the conflicted relationship between the colonial state and Indian nationalism in the context of early twentieth century India.

**Keywords**: Colonialism; Modernism; Nation; Nationalism; Colonial State; India.

**Somjyoti Mridha**
North-Eastern Hill University, India
somjyoti.mridha@gmail.com

DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2024.47.06

Colonialism was at its zenith during the early twentieth century in India and existed with all its attendant complexities. The interplay of ideologies of the Raj legitimizing colonial domination and various strands of Indian nationalism assiduously delegitimizing the same has emerged as the primary focus of intellectual enquiry for subsequent generations. It may have resulted in a limited understanding of the colonial world as it existed with collusion and defiance in varying degrees by different sections of Indian and British society that interacted with each other in an inherently hierarchical and graded socio-political order. Counter hegemonic discourses validated by Marxist, Post-colonial as well as Subaltern Studies Collective delegitimized colonialism and produced its own 'grand' narrative in sync with theoretical evolution in Western academia. Theorization of colonialism and its interaction with nationalism was produced in complete disregard to quotidian life during the colonial period. Edward Morgan Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) is an exploration of quotidian life in colonial India during the

1920s. The novel is based on Forster's travels in India during 1912-13 and his stint as a private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas Senior in 1921-22. *A Passage to India* is a significant modernist intervention in representing the British Indian Empire which gained instant popularity and subsequently attained canonical status. This paper primarily proposes to engage with the modalities of writing the empire mediated by modernist aesthetics.

Colonialism which primarily entailed usurpation of territory and political domination of the inhabitants was a political economy that benefitted colonizing western European countries at the expense of large parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas. This brutal and systemic power structure legitimized and labeled itself as a *civilizing mission* undertaken solely for the benefit of the hapless natives whose land has been colonized in order to bolster the economy of the colonizing power. The idea of *civilization* may be considered a contested terrain since it primarily meant enforced Europeanization of the native population. Enforced Europeanization also entailed myriad processes of disciplining the native population in order to produce "docile bodies" that was conducive to the political and economic interests of the colonizing power. The civilizing mission was undertaken in accordance with the principles of modernity and enforced Europeanization was labeled as modernization. In fact, political subservience to and cultural emulation of the colonizing power was labeled as *modern* during the colonial period. The idea of being *modern* was so central to the colonial world that nationalism –the rubric that encompasses all counter hegemonic anti-colonial discourses also embraced the principles of modernity and seldom deviated from the idea of being modern. Being modern remained a central pre-occupation during the colonial era. To be *modern* entailed being well versed in one or more European languages, to be acquainted with the social codes of European society, considerable knowledge of European art and literature and to be well acquainted with new technological innovations of the period. The idea of being modern was not a value neutral concept. It entailed positive connotation and its charms were irresistible so much so that most nationalists also ran helter-skelter to prove their credentials as modern.

Modernism as an aesthetic movement gained currency during early twentieth century at the height of colonial expansion. The modernist credo "*Make it New*"[1], popularized by Ezra Pound entailed epistemological break from nineteenth century/ Victorian ideals of aesthetics. The clarion call for modernism was given by an expatriate American that swept British culture between 1900 and the 1930s. It is also interesting that E. M. Forster derived the title of the novel from the famous American poet, Walt Whitman's poem "Passage to India" from *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Hence, it is evident that modernism was a broader rubric applied to cultural practitioners scattered on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. The movement was certainly not restricted to British or Anglophone literature. It is also crucial to note that avant-garde aesthetics practiced during the first three decades of twentieth century was labeled as Modernism in retrospect during the 1960s. Novelty was the hallmark of modernist aesthetics. Stream of consciousness narrative technique focusing on the psychological evolution of characters as opposed to realism of the Victorian period became the staple of fiction. According to Peter Childs,

> Modernist writing is most particularly noted for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism, and for its attempt to create a 'tradition of the new'. Its historical and social background includes the emergence of the New woman, the peak and downturn of the British Empire, unprecedented technological change, the rise of the Labour party, the appearance of factory-line mass production, and war in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Modernism has therefore almost universally been considered a literature of not just change but crisis.[2]

Modernism as an aesthetic sensibility was not restricted to literature. It was the most revolutionary in the arena of painting where Cubism and Dadaism brought about a paradigm shift. Newness or deviation from past was the key word in the cultural world during the early decades of twentieth century. While modernism as an aesthetic and literary movement is primarily concerned with the interiority of the self, there are variations in terms of its political sensibilities. While Modernist writers are generally labeled as status-quoist with negligible bearing on the political context of their creative endeavors, many among them did engage with the political context of the contemporary world. Modernism as an aesthetic impulse also inaugurated a critical outlook towards utilitarian values of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century institutionalized by Enlightenment philosophy and the world order that emerged as a consequence of the French revolution of 1789.

The colonial world of early twentieth century India was also a world of novelties. Indian society under the Raj underwent an epistemological break in terms of its socio-political ethos and knowledge systems due to the forcible introduction of English language and western systems of knowledge. It was also a period of remarkable re-fashioning of Indian identity when the nationalist patriarchy was assiduously reforming traditional and medieval practices associated with Hinduism through social reformation as well as through legal/juridical means. It was the period when nationalists constructed the figure of the "new" Indian woman who shall be the repository of Indian culture and values and yet be modern. The impulse behind the Bengal Sati Regulation Act of 1829, Widow Remarriages Act of 1856 and the Age of Consent act of 1891 was to construct a modern Indian society. The full weight of these reformation movements was felt in quotidian life by the early twentieth century. These watershed achievements in terms of the role and position of women were institutionalized by the 'modern' Indian intellectuals in collusion with the colonial state. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar may not have achieved much without the assistance of the modernizing colonial state that sought to reform Indian society along principles of modernity and liberal humanism.

Apart from social reforms, colonial India during the early twentieth century also witnessed various novel technological innovations. Though Postal system and Telegraph which revolutionized communication were introduced in the 1850s in colonial power centers like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, it reached the heartland only by the turn of the century. Motor cars, another novelty of the period, were introduced on Indian roads as late as 1897. Miss Derek's fascination with her car in the novel is understandable. Social reformation coupled with technological novelties ushered in the modern era in India with a caveat though. India during the early twentieth century was still a colony. Hence, 1920s is marked by urgency among Indian nationalists to invigorate the national movement for political sovereignty from the British. The quotation referred to in the title of this paper refers to a rail journey undertaken by the central protagonists to travel to the Marabar caves from Chandrapore. Railways emerged as a symbol of modernity in the Indian sub-continent both during the colonial era as well as in the post-colonial period. Railways were introduced by the colonial state in India in 1854. It revolutionized and facilitated mobility across the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent. The rural hinterland was brought closer to centers of colonial governance through the introduction of railways. It is crucial to note that railways brought about socialization of Indians transcending caste and class restrictions in the public domain for the first time. The picnic party in the novel comprising of elite Indians like Dr. Aziz, British colonials like Cyril Fielding, Mrs. Moore and Adela travelled along with their servants presumably from lower caste and class. Traditionally, Indians of different caste and class travelled through different modes of transportation. While elite Indians travelled in horse driven carriages or elephants, poorer Indians mostly walked during medieval period. The colonial state brought about a sense of equality in terms of their mode of transportation albeit a graded one since railway carriages had different classes.

The high tide of Modernism in Anglophone literature coincided with the high tide of Indian nationalist movement. It is interesting to note that 1922, the watershed moment of Anglophone modernist literature which saw the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* also saw the first mass movement in Indian struggle for Independence –the Non-Cooperation movement under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. While Indian struggle for freedom is said to have begun in 1857 with the sepoy mutiny which has been termed as the first war of Indian independence, it emerged as a mass movement only with the advent of Gandhi in the political scene in 1915. The Non-Cooperation movement brought forth a new era of mass involvement in the Indian freedom struggle hitherto unknown. It challenged the very basis of colonial ideological framework. Instead of posing a threat to the colonial state, the movement negated the very presence of the colonial state through passive resistance thereby revolutionizing Indian nationalist struggle against British colonial presence. E. M. Forster wrote and published *A Passage to India*, his magnum opus at the cusp of these aesthetic and political movements that crucially challenged aesthetic sensibilities and political hierarchies of the times.

Forster's mode of representation of India is not outside the ambit of 'Orientalism' though he is certainly more conscious of the interplay of politics and representation than most nineteenth century Orientalist and colonial novelists like Wilkie Collins or Rudyard Kipling. Edward Said defines Orientalism as,

> It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains it; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world…[3]

Forster strives to challenge the Manichaean worldview of traditional imperialists like Rudyard Kipling whose famous line from *The Ballad of the East and the West* signifies the typical attitude of an imperialist, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". His representation of friendship between Dr. Aziz, a physician in government employment and Mr. Fielding, the principal of a local college in Chandrapore is simultaneously a challenge as well as a vindication of Kipling's attitude towards racial relation in the context of colonialism. The race between Aziz and the outspoken subaltern is almost a prose rendition of Kipling's poem without the gravitas. Initially, Forster begins by referring to India as a "muddle" or a "mystery" most likely referring to the socio-cultural complexity of the vast sub-continent. This is also a clichéd colonial trope of *othering* – designating any socio-cultural or political difference as inferior. The colonial notion of incomprehensibility basically transpires from a lack of proper understanding of local customs and social mores which was then conceptualized as *unknowable* as well as inferior. This was the result of striving to factually *know* the colony in order to facilitate its control and governance rather than striving to understand its socio-cultural ethos. The Marabar caves evolve in the course of the novel as a metonymy for India – signifying the inexplicable or the *unknowable* with different aesthetic standards, therefore, beyond the apparatuses of enumeration and codification institutionalized by the colonial state.

The superiority of Western systems of knowledge and aesthetic standards are stressed reiteratively in the course of the novel. The primordial importance accorded to Anglicized education system through the medium of English language promoted by the colonial state is symptomatic of colonial dominance. The college at Chandrapore, headed by Fielding remains a crucial backdrop for the plot of the novel. It is also the site of Dr. Aziz and Fielding's friendship as well as the refuge for Adela once she lost the favour of the miniscule British society in Chandrapore. Colonial system of education was upheld as modern, therefore desirable for the Indian colony. Anglicized education was conceptualized as a tool for generating ideological consensus for English hegemony and its success in British controlled territories encouraged the colonial state to advocate

English education for the native princely state in order to establish its intellectual and linguistic hegemony in the Indian sub-continent. It is also crucial that these colonial institutions are headed only by Britishers while Indians are employed only as subordinates. Forster's condescension towards Indian culture and aesthetics includes tongue-in-cheek comments about Dr. Aziz's romantic strain in poetry or the ambiguous reception of Hindustani classical devotional music sung by Professor Godbole that was described as "a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible…"[4] Fielding complains about the lack of proportion and aesthetic standards in Indian architecture vis-à-vis Egyptian and Italian edifices in the novel.

Despite his liberalism, Forster exhibits quintessential orientalist essence in his representation of Indians whereby "The relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony…"[5]. There is a characteristic derision in his representation of elite or privileged Indians well versed in western systems of knowledge. Among his Indian characters, Dr. Aziz and Prof. Godbole have been represented in minute details. It is interesting since Dr. Aziz has been upheld as a representative Indian in the course of the novel. Forster's characterization occasionally veers towards the serio-comic especially in the characterization of Dr. Aziz. He is temperamental, petulant and is prone to feeling miffed frequently. In fact, his character follows the generic model of the Oriental described by Said,

> The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal." But the way of enlivening the relationship was everywhere to stress the fact that the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organized world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence[6].

Of course, Aziz develops in the course of the novel and emerges both as a nationalist and a mature person. The representative Indian has certainly evolved in substantial measure from the wily and obsequious Hurree Chunder Mookherjee in *Kim*. Aziz's interaction with the European characters brings about a gradual change in his character and demeanor though Forster does not necessarily suggest that social interaction with the English was beneficial for him. Contrary to his somewhat derisive treatment of elite and privileged Indians, Forster is more respectful in his representation of Dalits in India. The untouchable *punkhawallah* in the courtroom at Chandrapore is referred to as a "beautiful naked God"[7]. Forster is well aware of abject living conditions of the Dalits in India. There is a preponderance of physicality in his description of the *Punkhawallah*. "He had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection that she accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god…"[8] The queer gaze is self-evident though physicality is coupled with religious idiom. Forster's colonial gaze discerns the *Punkhawallah's* lack of political awareness in spite of being situated amidst political volatility. The description of the *Punkhawallah* follows the trajectory of the "noble savage" – another colonial trope repeatedly employed to describe the natives in colonized territories. Unlike, western educated Indians like Hamidullah, Dr. Aziz or Prof. Godbole, the illiterate and under privileged *Punkhawallah* poses no threat to colonial power structures. The author does not dwell on the predicament of the Dalits hereafter in the novel though the centrality of caste system and social hierarchy is referred to in the context of Mau, a Hindu princely state. Later, Forster wrote the introduction to Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* (1935) where he elaborates on the abject condition of Dalits in colonial India.

Forster's fictional world in *A Passage to India* is guided by a dilettante desire to be sympathetic towards the plight of colonized Indians without ever challenging the overarching power/ideological structures that was the basis of British colonization. At the outset, he introduces a bifurcated world defined by hierarchy which basically sets the tone for the turn of events that follow. Forster represents the colonial world without challenging the modalities of its operation. The topographical positioning of the 'Civil Station' reserved for the British residents of Chandrapore with its orderliness on a higher ground that looks down upon the multitudinous Indian sectors comprising of crowded bazaars and over populated living quarters is symptomatic of the Raj. The Eurasian quarters located in between the Indian quarters and the Civil Station "on the high ground by the railway station" emphatically exposes racial distribution of power and status as a structural feature of colonial rule in India. The omniscient narrator is unambiguous about the imbalance of power which divides the governed from the imperial race. Forster does question certain parameters of colonial governmentality but his perspective regarding the unequal distribution of power which accords privileges to the British in India is far from emancipatory. Besides, *A Passage to India* dabbles with the possibility of harmonious coexistence of the colonizer and the colonized without apparent contradictions. The novel's primary discursive agenda is to explore the possibility of personal amity between the members of the colonizer and colonized races thereby advocating a politics of amicable coexistence of the colonized and the colonizer. He proposes an apparently shallow resolution to a problem that is structural in nature in a bid to represent and discursivise the possibility of benevolent colonialism.

Colonialism as a political system is never challenged in the novel despite Forster's apparent critical outlook towards colonial governmentality, its hierarchies, follies and foibles. Forster's modernist anxiety of the empire and its paraphernalia is limited to critiquing specific officials which never encompasses the system. The officious attitude of the Turtons, the Collector of Chandrapore, casual racism of Mr. McBryde, the Superintendent of Police and authoritarianism of Ronny Heaslop, the city Magistrate, are all relegated as personal quirks rather than systemic aggression perpetrated against the colonized. Inexperienced Ronny considers British presence as beneficial to the Indian sub-continent and the omniscient narrator seems to vindicate his conviction repeatedly. The mild critique presented by the narrative consciousness is primarily to reform the operation of colonial administration rather than any substantive change in power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. *A Passage to India* presents political discussions interspersed with personal anecdotes while discussing the efficacy and need for British presence in India. Forster strives hard to appear objective though with the usual limitations of a beneficiary of the oppressive system. The general sentiment of the novel is that "England holds India for her good"[9]. Occasionally, Forster also expiates the virtues of *justice* and *law and order* which apparently British colonialism brought to India. These statements remain a constant refrain in the novel which legitimizes colonial presence without any obfuscation. While he expresses critical outlook towards the operation of the colonial state and advocates a more humane approach towards the governed, Forster never negates the necessity of colonial presence in the Indian sub-continent. Cyril Fielding, depicted as sympathetic to Indians in the novel prescribes nothing more than *kindness*, a personal virtue for Indians. In fact, political questions are accorded a moral dimension when Hamidullah, an Indian lawyer trained in England challenges England's right to govern India when the nation itself suffers from atheism, lack of religiosity and immorality. This is the first instance when British presence is questioned by an Indian protagonist but the resolution to a political question was sought through personal and moral dimension. Forster's reluctance to address the contentious issue is evident in the discussion between Hamidullah and Mr. Fielding.

The narrative traces the evolution of Dr. Aziz's political beliefs from a disgruntled colonized Indian to a full-blown nationalist negating the very presence and disciplining apparatuses of the empire by migrating to Mau, a Hindu princely state. Forster only explores the possibility of a politically sovereign India at the very end and not without derision. "India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth century sisterhood! Waddling it at the hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps![10]" Forster also doesn't approve of the nascent nationalist churning in Chandrapore among disparate Indians which is evident from his treatment of the nationalists in Chandrapore. He is critical of Hamidullah's nationalist friends and considers them as inconsequential. According to him, Indian's religious diversity impedes the efflorescence of nationalism in the sub-continent. Forster also explains that antipathy towards the English colonizers remain the basis of nationalism in India. He writes,

> …Hindus, Moslems. two Sikhs, two Parsees, a Jain, and a Native Christian tried to like one another more than came natural to them. As long as someone abused the English, all went well, but nothing constructive had been achieved, and if the English were to leave India the committee would vanish also[11].

In retrospect, it is crucial to note that Forster did anticipate the course of sub-continental history since India's religious diversity did bolster fissiparous tendencies in Indian nationalist politics eventually leading to partition of the subcontinent into a Hindu majority though constitutionally secular Indian nation state and a Muslim majority Islamic nation state of Pakistan which later on bifurcated into Pakistan on the west and the nation state of Bangladesh in the east.

The crucial issue that is camouflaged in personal and moral terms is basically a crisis in modernity. Modernity "is considered a way of living and of experiencing life which has arisen with the changes wrought by industrialization, urbanization and secularization; its characteristics are disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, ephemerality and insecurity"[12]. While the onset of modernity doesn't have a fixed point of origin in any particular historical epoch, it certainly brought about a crisis in socio-cultural ethos, inter-personal relations, political structures and aesthetic representation. It is generally characterized by an anthropocentric worldview based on rationality and utilitarian ethos with considerable stress accorded to individuality. It is generally associated with a certain degree of mechanization of life and technologization of the means of production. In the political arena it led to the rise of the political concept of 'nation' germinating from ideas of nationalism. In Europe, the political structure of nations began to emerge from the detritus of French Revolution of 1789. It germinated in parts of Asia and Africa in the twentieth century through the global circulation of political ideas ironically facilitated by the colonizing process undertaken by west European nations. It is also crucial that dissemination of ideas of nationalism and formation of nation/states reached its apogee during the heyday of literary modernism in the Anglophone world.

British colonies became central trope in English literature during the late nineteenth century since the glory and economic heft of Great Britain depended on its colonies. During the 1920s, British public sphere was abuzz with political aspirations of Irish nationalism which culminated in the creation of Irish nation state closer home and the partition of Ireland. Nationalism also emerged as a potent political force in India during the 1920s when Forster was writing the novel. The rise of nationalism in general and Indian nationalism in particular was of grave concern for the survival of British Empire. Nationness emerged as the most legitimate form of political aspiration for people who identified as a singular community against colonization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Political oppression coupled with colonial modernity disseminated through western systems of knowledge brought ideas of nationalism to the colonies scattered in Asia and Africa. Nationalism anticipated a more egalitarian system of power sharing between members of a political community with a shared history and some degree of linguistic, cultural and racial similarity. These modern principles of organizing the society and polity led to the popularity of nationalism and nations among subjugated population of the vast European empires forced to come to terms with a hierarchical society structured along racial lines. Nations were imagined in contradistinction to the ideologies of empire. Scholars like Eric Hobsbawm, Ernst Gellner and Benedict Anderson conceptualized nations and nation-states as products of modernity. Hobsbawm writes,

> The basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it is its modernity. This is now well understood, but the opposite assumption, that national identification is somehow so natural, primary and permanent as to precede history, is so widely held that it may be useful to illustrate the modernity of the vocabulary of the subject itself.[13]

Benedict Anderson puts forward the presence of certain conditions facilitated by modern technology like print capitalism and means of transportation and communication which encouraged a sense of horizontal camaraderie among people socially unknown to each other. Technological marvels of the nineteenth century like railways, post and telegraph, telephone and motor vehicles all facilitated the swift governance of the empire as well as the emergence of nationalism. It is crucial to note that all these paraphernalia of modernity were brought to India by the colonial state controlled by the British colonizers. Anderson valorizes the role of print capitalism as a facilitator of national consciousness. He writes:

> These print languages laid the bases for national consciousness in three distinct ways: First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication…Second, print-capitalism gave new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation… Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars.[14]

It is interesting to note that these same conditions also facilitated governance of territorially vast colonies like the British Indian Empire. The colonial state also facilitated a system of education, though acutely underfunded, which was crucial for the success of print modernity and the emergence of modern Indian languages. In *A Passage to India*, there is a characteristic similarity in the way Forster writes the empire and Indian nationalists "imagines" their nation. He gradually unravels the diversity and complexity of India in the course of the novel. Forster asserts in the novel that "Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing…" alluding to the diversity and complexity of the Indian sub-continent.[15] The reference to the fictional princely state of Mau, most likely based on the princely state of Dewas Senior, and its distinct social and cultural practices testifies to the fact. The vastness of the British colonial possessions in India is illustrated through a reference to all the places that Mrs. Moore regrets not being able to visit.

> She would never visit Asirgarh or the other untouched places; neither Delhi nor Agra nor the Rajputana cities nor Kashmir, nor the obscurer marvels that had sometimes shone through men's speech: the bilingual rock of Girnar, the statue of Shri Belagola, the ruins of Mandu and Hampi, temples of Khajuraho, gardens of Shalimar… 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar caves as final?[16]

It is interesting that Mrs. Moore is made aware of the vastness of the British Indian Empire after her train journey from

Chandrapore to Bombay. Railways and travel remain a recurrent motif in the novel. It is crucial to note that random references to places in the Indian subcontinent interestingly includes places located within the precincts of British Indian Empire as well as princely states such as Kashmir and Mandu signifying British suzerainty over the Indian sub-continent irrespective of direct British control or its absence. It is also interesting that Mrs. Moore's ruminations about the vastness of India and places of historical significance comes when she is travelling through the colonial city Bombay imbued with colonial modernity thereby designating India primarily as a pre-modern and medieval space vis-à-vis England always referred to as a modern space providing refuge to jaded colonials. Bombay, a modern colonial metropolis is presented as a testament to the modernizing, in effect, the civilizing impulse of the empire.

Dr. Aziz's migration from British India to the princely state of Mau illustrates India's diversity apart from stating his political stance of negating the presence of empire. The princely state of Mau is conceptualized as a quintessential pre-modern medieval space with traditional modes of governance, medical facilities and utter lack of modern educational facilities. Forster repeatedly mocks religiosity among Indians in the course of the novel. It is especially prominent in his description of the festivities of Gokul Ashtami in the state of Mau. It is interesting to note that in the course of the narrative Indians as a collective congregate for religious festivals like Gokul Ashtami and Muharrum which leads to problems of law and order while the British congregate in secular spaces like the club or residential spaces in order to discuss governance and the maintenance of law and order. Forster's conceptualization of the empire is primarily undertaken in modern terms –with the use of leisure, travel as well as secular discussions among enlightened intellectuals. On the contrary, Dr. Aziz's conception of the nation primarily entails hearkening back to pre-colonial glory of the Mughal era when Muslims were at the helm of affairs in India. Initially, Aziz's imagination of the nation was religiously exclusive and did not include the vast majority of the Hindus. This narrative strategy also exposes communal provenance of Indian nationalist thought during the early twentieth century. His pre-occupation with the metaphor of 'Bulbul' in his furtive poetic endeavors is crucial since India was popularly conceptualized during the colonial era as a golden bird caged by the British colonizers. Aziz was never far away from nationalist myth making even before he became a full-fledged nationalist after his incarceration on false charges. Considering the Hindu majoritarian impulses of Indian nationalism during its formative years, it is ironic that Dr. Aziz, a Muslim physician, belonging to an erstwhile aristocratic Muslim family, is presented by Forster as a representative Indian. Forster's travels in India were greatly facilitated by his friend, Sir Ross Masood bin Mahmood Khan, the grandson of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. His depiction of Dr. Aziz was somewhat modeled on his friend.

History emerges as a discursive battleground during the colonial era between Indian nationalists and British scholars promoted by the colonial state. British historians began churning out books on the history of India since mid-eighteenth century[17]. It was coeval with the possibility of an Indian Empire ascertained by military conquests of the English East India Company in 1757 and 1764 at the battle of Plassey and Buxar respectively. History as a discursive field became significant since it provided a convenient tool for the nationalists to articulate the community –that is 'nation' and for the colonial state to legitimize its presence. Histories of India written by British historians or administrators were united in their project of legitimizing the empire building exercise in the Indian sub-continent. Colonial history writing project was primarily engaged in elaborating the 'backwardness' of India with an occasional Orientalist historian showering encomiums on certain aspects of the Indic civilization. Indian scholars and nationalists tried to write back and provide a counter discourse to colonial historiography by celebrating glorious achievements of the Indic civilization from the ancient and the medieval era. Occasionally, both categories of historians resorted to myth-making in order to bolster their claims. While Forster is not primarily concerned about history writing but no form of representation is outside the ambit of history or Orientalist systems of knowledge. The reference to India in the title is a reference to both the British Indian Empire and the collective – Indian. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has rightly commented in his article "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", "So long as one operates within the discourse of 'history'…it is not possible simply to walk out of the deep collusion between 'history' and the modernizing narrative(s) of citizenship, bourgeois public and private, and the nation-state"[18]. The fierce battle fought in the domain of history is primarily because of the dichotomy between the nation and the state in context of colonial India. Like his counterparts among Indian nationalists and British Orientalists, Forster also indulges in historicizing India. Unlike them, he refers to geological time when the landmass termed as India drifted from Gondwanaland, the super continent, and joined Asia. Its impact formed the mighty Himalayas, the Gangetic river system and subsequently the Indo-Gangetic plains. Forster mixes scientific history with Hindu myth dating back to geological time thereby bolstering the claims of Indian nationalist and Orientalist historians about the antiquity of India.

> The Ganges, though flowing from the foot of Vishnu and through Shiva's hair, is not an ancient stream. Geology, looking further than religion, knows of a time when neither the river nor the Himalayas that nourish it existed, and an ocean flowed over the holy places of Hindustan. The mountains rose, their debris silted up the ocean, the gods took their seats on them and contrived the river, and the India we call immemorial came into being. But India is really far older. In the days of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula already existed, and the high places of Dravidia have been land since land began…[19]

Unlike Dr. Aziz, Forster stresses on geology or earth sciences and not on ancient Sanskrit religious texts like the Vedas, the Puranas or the Persian epics which was the usual archive for the historians. In a crucial way, Forster's intervention on the debate of India's antiquity is modernist in impulse, aided and abetted by scientific research of Geological Survey of India, another institution founded by the colonial state in 1851. It is also interesting to note the nexus between scientific knowledge and colonial economy of extraction and exploitation of resources since the Geological Survey of India was founded in order to search for coal in the eastern part of the country. Coal was crucial for Britain since industrial production and output depended on its supply.

In Europe, nations are coterminous with the modern bureaucratic state since the advent of modernity was indigenous to the land. In the context of India, modernity was of colonial provenance which further complicated the relationship between the nation and the state. This complicated relationship brought about a crisis of modernity in colonial India. There is also a crucial distinction between the efflorescence of nationalism in West European nations and its development in large parts of Asia and Africa colonized by these nations. Anthony D. Smith aptly explains it in *Nationalism and Modernism* (1998). In Western Europe, "the nation tended to emerge together with, and out of the crucible of, the bureaucratic state, while western nationalisms, too, can be seen in large part as state-oriented movements, ideological movements for consolidating and enhancing state power"[20]. The efflorescence of nationalism and nation-state did not follow similar trajectory in the colonial world of Asia and Africa. Nationalism and germination of the putative nation developed both in collusion as well as collision with the empire symbolized by the colonial state in these parts. According to Anthony D. Smith, "...the West is generally characterized by a 'state-to-nation' trajectory, that of Eastern Europe and parts of Asia can be more convincingly analyzed in terms of a 'nation-to-state' model"[21]. The colonial world underwent various ideological maneuverings since the colonial state as well as nationalist elite both tried to generate ideological consensus in their favor. These ideological refashioning of traditional colonized society is termed as social reform in common parlance leading to a crisis in the social world of the putative nation.

The crisis emerged since the nation and the state are not in sync with each other in terms of its constitution. The colonial state remained the exclusive prerogative of the British colonizers while the nation overwhelmingly comprises of colonized Indians devoid of political rights. Indians do not necessarily partake in the operation of the state machinery apart from subordinate positions. The colonial state is primarily controlled by the miniscule minority of white British population who enjoys power, authority and exclusive rights to spaces defined by racial privileges. Even Forster mostly represents Indians as a collective. They always exist in a group like during Dr. Aziz's trial or after the victorious verdict. On the contrary, most of the British characters are represented in isolation primarily engaged in administrative activities. The British population of Chandrapore only congregates at the racially exclusive club. There is barely any social interaction between the two. Furtive attempts like the tea party of the Turtons are anticipated to be failures even before they happen. There is absolutely no common ground between the colonizer and colonized which thwarts any possibility of convergence of political or individual interests. In fact, the collective interests of the groups are antithetical to each other. It creates a unique condition where the state and the nation are divergent in their political goals leading to political, social and cultural ambiguity referred to in the sphere of culture as the negotiation between tradition and modernity. The colonial world was characterized by ambiguous negotiation of the colonized population comprising the 'nation' in order to wrest control of the state from the colonizer. It entailed embracing "modernity" by the adoption of modern ideas such as nationalism along with the idea of a modern bureaucratic state while delegitimizing the agency which brought them. It leads to a curious situation where nationalist who arguably are modernists hearken back to pre-colonial history in order to legitimize the creation of a modern state deriving legitimacy from the "nation' who comprises of the erstwhile colonized and oppressed population. Partha Chatterjee has interpreted this dichotomy that constitutes imagining the nation in the context of the colonial state in a very succinct way:

> In the beginning, nationalism's task is to overcome the subordination of the colonized middle class, that is, to challenge the "rule of colonial difference" in the domain of the state. The colonial state, we must remember, was not just the agency that brought the modular forms of the modern state to the colonies; it was also an agency that was destined never to fulfill the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was a rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group[22].

According to Chatterjee, anti-colonial nationalism strives to take cultural control over native society before they initiate the struggle for achieving statehood by dividing the colonial world into 'material' and 'spiritual' domains. The spiritual domain consists of those aspects of colonized society which facilitates identity formation. It constitutes religious, cultural and social aspects of the colonized society. "In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a "modern" national culture that is nevertheless not Western[23]. The intelligentsia and cultural elite of the colonized society construct the cultural core of the putative nation in stark contrast to the westernizing impulse of the empire.

The Manichean structure of European colonization also creates its own dichotomy in the colonized society where the state or the material domain in control of the colonizer, hence, differentiated from the nation which constitutes the colonized community. There is a characteristic resistance on both sides of the colonial divide to socialize on intimate terms as exemplified both by Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate as well as the Bhattacharyas'. Ronny Heaslop exposes his colonial one-upmanship all throughout the novel and is reluctant to allow his mother and fiancé to socially intermingle with elite Indians. The Bhattacharyas', though in employment of the colonial state, are equally reluctant to allow British colonials into their private residence –the inner world or spiritual domain of the nation. The princely state of Mau is also reluctant to let colonial modernity breach the private domain of the ruler. The state is reluctant to embrace modernity and its scientific paraphernalia as well as English education. Though Forster chastises them for being anti-modern, it may be interpreted as cultural resistance to Anglicization –the official policy of the British Empire. None other than Benedict Anderson describes Anglicization recommended by Macaulay for the British Indian Empire as a text book case of *official nationalism* of the colonial state.

There are moments in the novel when Britishers and elite Indians interact intimately in the private domain. Forster seriously engages with the idea of social bonhomie or friendship between the two embattled races, occasionally embittered in the sub-continent due to their racial/political position in the colonial enterprise. Moments of social intimacy like the soiree at Professor Godbole's house or the picnic at Marabar caves hosted by Dr. Aziz led to dire consequences for both Indians and Britons. Occasionally, it led to lifelong friendship though not always pleasant for either individual as the case with Dr. Aziz and Fielding in the course of the novel. It is may be safe to state that a social crisis of some sort transpire whenever British colonials penetrate the domestic/inner world of the colonized Indians –a quintessential national space exclusively reserved for the community, the sanctum sanctorum of the nation. It is interesting to note that Rudyard Kipling mostly depicted inter-racial social interactions in the public sphere in *Kim*. Kim, unlike Cyril Fielding, Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore never desires social intimacy with the Indians though he collaborates with them in the service of the Empire.

Forster's idea of friendship is inherently political. He famously valorized friendship in his collection of essays, *Two Cheers for Democracy*,

> I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country. Such a choice may scandalise the modern reader…Probably one will not be asked to make such an agonizing choice. Still, there lies at the back of every creed something terrible and hard for which the worshipper may one day be required to suffer, and there is even a terror and hardness in this creed of personal relationships, urbane and mild though it sounds. Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of the State. When they do—down with the State say I, which means the State would down me[24].

The amity that Forster proposes between members of the imperial race and the ruled is not only political in nature but also contextualized within a hierarchical political system like colonialism. The politics of friendship so vehemently advocated by Forster is ambiguous about the interests of British colonial presence or Indian subjects of the Empire. Occasionally, Forster's primary motive seems to naturalize British presence within the precincts of the putative Indian nation yet there are instances when the narrative intends to challenge as well as critique colonial ideology. Forster's ambiguity is the result of *internationalism* augmented by modernist ethos that swept the Anglo-American literary world during the 1920s. The politics of "immediate conjunction, conjuncture, coalition, and collaboration 'between' the most unlikely of associates" envisaged an alternative political arrangement, however tenuous, starkly different from the one that came into being whereby the Britishers were incorporated within the putative Indian nation leading to political harmony and unbridled march of modernity[25]. The *nation* and the *state* did become coterminous in the context of India when Indian nationalism gained control of the state by achieving political independence and sovereignty in 1947 but it did not incorporate the erstwhile colonizers. Forster, though prescient on many prognoses, did not accurately anticipate the contours of contemporary anti-colonial aspirations.

Forster's evident belief and support to the British imperial project and his orientalist/colonialist perception of India camouflages his covert attraction towards radical as well as dissident sub-cultures of late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperial Britain. Like most of the members of Bloomsbury group, he was deeply invested in left liberal political ideas and was vehemently opposed to militarism and violence. The political core of modernism within the ambit of British literature, spearheaded by Bloomsbury writers, was antithetical to utilitarian values and colonizing culture of Victorian Britain. The contours of modernism encompassed radical, occasionally dissident sub-cultures of late Victorian and Edwardian England in a bid to create its autonomy and distinct identity vis-à-vis Victorian ethos on the cultural front. Similar to global circulation of Modernist ethos and lifestyle, Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf or E. M. Forster were progressive in terms of their gender/sexual politics and emphatically advocated sexual liberty contrary to Victorian notions of propriety and chastity. In the context of early twentieth century, British intellectuals, though radical in their political beliefs at home, were mostly immune to inequities in the colonies. Forster's ambiguity in terms of political beliefs is a result of this curious mixture of colonial as well as modernist belief system.

Forster's politics of friendship has been succinctly decoded by Leela Gandhi in *Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (2008). She writes, "Thus, weaving together the disparate energies of Marxism, utopian experimentation, and continental anarchism, these individuals and movements facilitated the mutation of "internationalism" into a series of counter revolutionary practices for which I claim the name "politics of friendship"[26]. The idea of cosmopolitan solidarity across racial and political divide was greatly influenced by British utopian thought and experimentation in the colonial metropolis. Forster's idea of friendship was also influenced by British upper middle-class values and a dilettante desire to be just within a primarily unjust system. His politics of transgressing the social boundaries to embrace friendship of the racial "other" exemplified by Cyril Fielding, Adela Quested, Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore in the novel may also be linked with his homosexuality. British society was guided by social hierarchy during the nineteenth century and respectability was accorded to heteronormative and propertied men. Homosexuality was derided upon and kept out of the bounds of respectability. Forster, growing up during Oscar Wilde's infamous trials for gross indecencies, a euphemism for homosexuality was well aware of British society's disgust and hypocrisy towards homosexuality. His reluctance to publish *Maurice* during his lifetime vindicates his weariness of public reception towards his sexuality. Marginalization on the home front may have goaded queer intellectuals like Forster to nurture nascent anti-imperial thought as well as socially align with the colonized, hence marginal *other*. Absence of social recognition of homosexuality in Britain forced openly homosexual and eminent individuals like Forster to live the life of solitude and repressed desire. In the absence of socially recognized sexual intimacy and a long-term partner, Forster, like most queer intellectuals of the era, privileged friendship over other forms of personal and social intimacy. Queer intellectuals like Edward Carpenter have expressed their solidarity with the colonized and oppressed Indians in their literary endeavors since the nineteenth century[27]. Carpenter's poem *Towards Democracy* (1883) was emphatic about his support towards Indians reeling under the oppressive colonial rule of Britain. Carpenter was explicit about the influence of his "experience and condition of homosexuality as the cornucopian source of his ethical and political capacity"[28]in the development of his radical anti-imperial politics. Queer subculture of early twentieth century Britain was greatly influenced by Edward Carpenter's life and writings. Forster was a close friend of Carpenter and modeled his explicitly queer novel, *Maurice* on the life of Edward Carpenter. Forster may have been guided by an identical impulse to dabble in a nascent form of anti-imperial politics in *Passage to India*. His oblique references to anti-imperial politics merge well with modernist abhorrence of all forms of tyranny and authority. J.R. Ackerley, another queer intellectual and Forster's friend and contemporary also wrote about colonial governance and British administrators in India in a similar vein of critique in his travelogue *Hindoo Holiday* (1932).

During the heyday of colonialism, many writers on both sides of the colonial divide envisaged *friendship* between the colonizer and the colonized in their novels, like Rudyard Kipling in *Kim* (1901), Sarath Kumar Ghosh in *Prince of Destiny* (1909) and Sidda Mohana Mitra in *Hindupore* (1909). Territorial vastness of the British Empire scattered across five continents encouraged cosmopolitanism without official approval. The British Empire consisted of territories populated by disparate people militarily conquered either by subjugating the defeated or through internecine conflict against other European colonizing powers. Governance of these disparate territories would have been impossible without some form of social interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. Imperial metropolitan centers like London, Dublin, Calcutta, Bombay and Singapore saw a racially and ethnically diverse population. While colonial power structures graded society in terms of power distribution and strived to minimize interaction, the "irremediable leakiness of the imperial boundaries" led to consolidation of solidarities across racial and imperial divide. Communities were politically and racially determined by the colonial state. While the colonial state under the aegis of the British legally banned conjugal relationship between Indians and Britishers in the aftermath of sepoy mutiny of 1857, social interaction of all forms could not be legally prohibited. There was a certain degree of government sanction for a mitigated form of segregation along racial/political lines. By the early twentieth century when Forster was writing *A Passage to India*, social interaction in the form of *friendship* between colonized Indians and the English were encouraged. In crucial ways friendship as a form of social interaction tried to bridge the hiatus between the colonial state and the national community. For avant-garde intellectuals like Forster, friendship became the ontological basis for the formation of a modern community irrespective of race, class, creed, political and national affiliation in a modern world progressively mechanized with the aid of modern technology.

Forster lived during the heyday of British colonization. British colonial possessions reached its zenith when Forster was writing *Passage to India* during the early 1920s. The spoils of the First World War augmented the prestige and glory of Britain. Though Forster was by no means a hardcore imperialist, it was rather difficult for Forster to imagine a world without the overarching presence of British colonial rule. His ideological moorings certainly reflect residual imperialism/orientalism mediated by modernist ethos of the 1920s. His proximity with the Bloomsbury group and personal intimacy with modernist stalwarts like Virginia Woolf also influenced his ideological and aesthetic moorings. Therefore, Forster's ideological and aesthetic strategies reflect mediation between the apparently contradictory ideologies of colonialism and modernism. Beyond the macro-political concerns of colonialism and nationalism, Forster's representation of the colonial world also exposes his attraction towards the radical sub-cultures of imperial Britain of his times. The interplay of modernist radicalism as well as Orientalist framework of representation characterizes his representation of colonial India.

## Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, New Delhi, OUP, 1997, p. 223-274.

Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Childs, Peter, *Modernism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017.

Forster, E. M., *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Classics, 1924.

Forster, E. M., *Two Cheers for Democracy*, London, Edward Arnold, 1951.

Gandhi, Leela, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2006.

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*: *Programme, Myth, Reality,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, Penguin Random House, 1978.

Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998.

# Notes

1. *Make it New* is the title of Ezra Pound's seminal collection of essays published in 1934. It emphasizes on the underlining principles of Modernism.
2. Peter Childs, *Modernism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 15. .
3. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, Penguin Random House, 1978, p.12.
4. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Classics, 1924, p. 72.
5. Edward Said, *op. cit.,* p.5.
6. *Ibidem*, p.40.
7. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Classics, 1924, p. 217.
8. *Ibidem*, p. 205.
9. *Ibidem*, p. 102..
10. *Ibidem*, p. 306.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 97.
12. Peter Childs, *op. cit.,* p. 15..
13. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*: *Programme, Myth, Reality,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 14.
14. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 44-45.
15. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Classics, 1924, p. 135..
16. *Ibidem*, p. 197-198.
17. The era of history writing began almost as soon as the English East India Company gained military victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar in 1764 and the possibility of British dominance over Indian sub-continent was palpable. Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan* was published in three volumes between 1770 and 1772.
18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, New Delhi, OUP, 1997, p. 223-274.
19. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Classics, 1924, p. 115.
20. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, London and New York, Routledge,1998, p. 74.
21. *Ibidem*, p. 74.
22. Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, New Delhi, OUP, 1999, p. 10.
23. *Ibidem*, p. 6.
24. E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, London, Edward Arnold, 1951, p. 66. .
25. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2006, p. 20.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 9.
27. Edward Carpenter's poem "Towards Democracy" published in 1883 attained canonical status among radical intelligentsia during the late nineteenth century in London. The poem advocated dismantling of the British Empire in India and expressed political solidarity with Indians.
28. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2006, p. 35