

3-D Cultural Encounters Expressive of A Passage to India

Zhengshun Han

School of Foreign Languages
Wuhan Textile University
Wuhan, China
e-mail: hanzhengshun@126.com

Dan Zhou

School of Foreign Languages
Wuhan Textile University
Wuhan, China
e-mail: windy_zhou@163.com

Abstract—A Passage to India is the masterpiece of E.M. Forster and a classical work of the early 20th century, which exposes the insuperable chasm between the Great Britain and India. The book is full of bitter irony, beautiful lyrics, meaningful symbol and far-reaching philosophical predict. In 1996, it was voted as one of the “100 Greatest Books of the Century.” The novel was translated into silver screen in 1984, directed by David Lean, starring by Judy Denis. It won the nomination of the 57th Oscar Award for the best film, the best director, the best actress the best photography, so on and so forth, totaling 11 in 1985. Mysterious, Subtle and rich in symbolism, the novel works on several levels through this exotic trip. It presents us a movie with a profound theme, picturesque shooting, intricate plots, eye-pleasing and yet thought-provoking at the same time. The message is clear: lonely is human, and communication is all but impossible between them. The gulf between the British and native Indians grows wider than ever despite Aziz’s dropping of the case, and the novel ends on an ambiguous note. This thesis ventures to sort out the complex and complicated strands of cultural phenomena from the following three dimensions, that is, (1) the religious spectrum, (2) the ruling class perspective, (3) the ruled class/the civilian level. The writer of this thesis attempts to explore and clarify the underlying reasons that contributes to the cultural clashes present in the movie so as to shed more light on those who are doing cross-cultural interactions between the East and the West, to avoid pitfalls, embarrassments, and above all, unnecessary misunderstandings.

Keywords—Passage to India; cultural clashes; misunderstandings; Oriental

I. INTRODUCTION

In the eyes of westerners, India was viewed as a mysterious, enchanting place, as it was portrayed as a land of riches and a land of mystery. Such a view is especially harbored by Ms Adela Quested, who came “to see the real India” and looks forward to going on an adventure throughout India. Quested’s “real India,” which involved interacting with the appreciating the natives, serves as the antithesis to the India of the British expatriate, as symbolized in the Chandrapore Club, which was off-limits to Indians, as members or even guests. This club was regarded as the symbol of British aloofness among the populace of British India, as in practice, they lived apart from them and were truly

distant from ordinary Indians. However, there were a few exceptions to the common image of the British as aloof from the Indians and heavily tied to the United Kingdom, notably Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore, who were looking forward to “seeing the other side of the world”.

A Passage to India can be roughly divided into three long sections, which correspond, in Forster’s viewpoint, to the three seasons of the Indian year—Mosque (the cool weather), Caves (the hot weather), and Temple (the rains). This breath-taking film, relates, likewise, to an emotional and deeply personal story of love and class—struggle in 1928 of India. Adela Quested (starring by Judy Denis) travels to India to visit her fiancée who was the city magistrate of fictional city of Chandapore. She is on an adventure accompanied by his mother, Mrs Moore, an elderly woman who is appalled at the treatment of Indians by the British who rule and occupy Chandapore. Both women befriended with a young Indian man; Dr. Aziz, who overstepping the accepted boundaries between the classes, invited the women on a picnic excursion to the Marabar Cave. In a strange turn of events, the young doctor is accused of attempting to rape Miss Quested. What actually did happen in the Marabar Cave remains the central riddle of this lush engrossing movie.

II. THE RELIGIOUS SPECTRUM ILLUMINATING THIS MOVIE

What meets the eye from the start of this movie is the painting of a Hinduist picture featuring decorated female statues with one in the foreground and many behind to mark a Hindu celebration with a faded brown background. It strikes us impressively in this oriental religion: mysterious, exotic and otherworldly or pagan. This is in stark contrast to the usual Christian images of Jesus’ crucifixion on the Cross or other related images. Next scene comes the chance encounter between Aziz and Ms Moore in the mosque at night. Dr. Aziz went there to seek peace and comfort in soul after he was tricked by his immediate overlord as an exercise of his power of being a superior, while Ms. Moore ventured to experience the Muslim mood and was enveloped in an aura of nightly grandeur. Aziz thought he met a ghost and resented someone who refuse to take off his/her shoes when coming into the mosque for no one is being present or for convenience’s sake. However, out of his expectation, he ran into this kind, old lady who respected and revered the religious practice of removing

her shoes at the entrance to the mosque and remarked that "God is here." Here we see the strict observance of Muslim custom by her and witnessed the fusion of religious beliefs at the average level. Then the scenario moves to Adela's exploring of the real country by riding a bike. She ventured to spot some stone carvings and rocky hills with native religious connotations, particularly one plump woman with her female figures well-outlined so clearly that her face resembling the solemnity of a Buddha, with necklace around her neck, still more with her two breasts and teats protruding prominently, and with her two hands joining each other cuddling a cup over her stomach. Lying on the grass (These are Hinduist images of sexual intercourses). All these heavy religious images hit hard on her. In particular, she was chased by a group of ferocious monkeys showing their teeth who jump off the stone hills one after another in haste. What a terrible and frightening scene she came across against this strongly religious cultural backdrop. Besides, another benevolent figure, Mrs. Moore, her name becomes closely associated with Hinduism, especially the Hindu tenet of the oneness and unity of all living things. This symbolic side to her might even make her the heroine of the novel, the only English person able to closely connect with the Hindu vision of unity. Later on, when professor Godbole showed his indifference to Aziz's plight, and asked Fielding to name his school, Fielding demanded why? He just remarked that the result is the same whatever you do about it. It is predestined. This truly demonstrated his belief in "the wheel of life, death and rebirth." His subsequent song-singing towards the end of the movie remained incomprehensible to the audiences of the movie and failed to summon the deities. These rich religious coloring dominates and permeates this movie like the majestic azure sky and the immense Himalayas overlooking the insignificant human beings, isn't it?

III. THE RULING CLASS PERSPECTIVE

As for the British colonial administrators, they were in India for economic reasons, that is, to pursue lucrative investment opportunities and to pursue lucrative careers, as bureaucrats and administrators, instead of integrating themselves into Indian society, they came a caste unto itself, a ruling caste, of British people in exile. As members of a self-created caste, they didn't associate themselves with the natives of India, as they considered themselves far above them.

First thing first, it was best exemplified in the exclusivity of the Chandrapore Club, which was closed to Indians, whether as members or even guests. Simply put, they did not consider India home, as best said by Ronny Heaslop, a British administrator, who came to view the locals with blatant contempt, with his post in India leading to him "having developed sides of his character that [Ms. Quested] had never admired", an obvious consequence of the colonial system in force. Ronny thinks that the local Indians are never up to any good, and that there is a devious meaning "behind any remark [the Indian] makes," portraying the educated Indians as devious and untrustworthy in their attempts to please the British. Mrs. Moore's noting of Heaslop's present behavior as

unheard of at home and, thus, completely unexpected, means that his assignment in India has made him distrustful of other people and easily bad-tempered. Forster uses the comparison between his present behavior and his behavior back in England as an illustration of the effects of colonial India on the corrupted elite and the excluded Indian populace, who were cast as outsiders in their own land, as they were effectively barred from the highest-paying jobs and positions.

Another problem between the British rulers and the Indians is not of exclusivity, but of mistrust between both these two peoples. This is best represented through Turton's invitation of the "numerous Indian gentlemen in the neighborhood" for a party, known as the Bridge Party, which is not warmly received among the Indians, who are skeptical. One of them, Mahmoud Ali, viewed this invitation as one from afar, as many of the officials live far from them. Forster establishes the skepticism regarding the party, which was set up by a British official as a cross-cultural exchange between the Indians and the British.

Thirdly, the ruling class in the British Colony governed in a ruthless and cold-blooded manner by harboring pride and prejudices against the Indians. At the outset, these new arrivals may be quite courtly and courteous, nevertheless, after sometime, "I give it six months, All are exactly alike." "be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter." They run over people in their cars pompously. Again, Ronny fit this precisely. He attempt to rise in the rank system by ill-treating the Indians as a career which he didn't want to damage. This incurred strong criticism from his own mother as an "exercise of power and display of personal superiority". Forster's emphasis is on the change that happened before the novel begins as a sort of case study, an exploration of the restrictions that the English colonials' herd mentality imposes on individual personalities. All of Ronny's previously individual tastes are effectively dumbed down to meet group standards: self arrogance and belittling of the natives. He devalues his intelligence and learning from England in favor of the "wisdom" gained by years of experience in India. The open-minded attitude with which he has been brought up has been replaced by a suspicion of Indians. In short, Ronny's tastes, opinions, and even his manner of speaking are no longer his own, but those of older, ostensibly wiser British Indian officials. This kind of group thinking is what ultimately causes Ronny to clash with both Adela and his mother, Mrs. Moore. The best and finest manifestation is in the statement remarked by Mr. McBryde. "that the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa---not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm", (Chapter XXIV, p.219.) which set the tone for the trial. Do you still need to ask?

IV. THE RULED CLASS LEVEL

From this aspect, however, such people like Ms. Quested and Mrs. Moore were among the minority of Britons who actually appreciated "the real India", and thus refuse to conform to their assigned roles in society so as to appreciate India's cultures. As one of a kind, Mrs. Moore, and Miss

Quested, who can't make up her mind whether or not to marry Ronny and wants to see him "on the job" in India before deciding. Both women are anxious to see "the real India" and are bored by the dull, parochial round of British tea parties which is all they've seen so far. When Major Turton, Ronny's superior, hears that they want to meet some Indians, he obligingly offers to arrange a "Bridge Party" for them, to which both nationalities will be invited. The other British ladies are amused and faintly shocked that anyone should want to meet Indians, but Mrs. Moore and Adela gratefully accept Mr. Turton's offer. But their greetings are cold and perfunctory. Even Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested, with all the good will in the world, cannot get much response from the Indians after this pattern of British frigidity has been established. They ask to call on one of the Indian ladies-Mrs. Bhattacharya – and are met with a bewildering combination of friendliness and ignorance.

Ms. Moore doesn't think Ronny behave pleasantly to Indians. He exclaims "how like a woman to worry over a side-issue!" and when his mother objects, he adds "We're not here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly. We're out here to do justice and keep peace." Mrs. Moore, however, retorted that "the English are out here to be pleasant... because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God... is... love." His mother's argument makes Ronny "gloomy," however. He knows this "religious strain in her" and regards it as a "symptom of bad health."

What's more, Dr. Aziz, the mouthpiece of friendly and courteous Oriental, was eager to befriend these "other-worldly" women, and invited them to accomplish their goal of seeing a "real India." In this course, he paid a huge price of both fame and finance, to be frank, totally destructive to him. But their intentions of building a brilliant bridge over these two peoples are well praised and commended. The motifs of the movie is to foster intercultural communication, to achieve harmony and great unity between different races and cultures.

V. CONCLUSION

The huge gulf between these two groups is a physical as well as a social one. Indeed *A Passage to India* is a critique of British rule of India. The British are not shown as tyrants, although they do fail to understand Indian religion and culture. They regard Indians as their inferiors, incapable of leadership. And yet, in their own way, they try to rule in a just way. Ronny, is completely sincere when he says that the British "are out here to do justice and keep the peace" (chapter 5). And there is no trace of satire in the passage that shortly follows this, which describes Ronny's daily routine: "Every day he worked hard in the court trying to decide which of two untrue account was the less untrue, trying to dispense justice fearlessly, to protect the weak against the less weak, the incoherent against the plausible, surrounded by lies and flattery." Ronny is also aware of the hostility between Hindus and Moslems, and believes that a British presence is necessary to prevent bloodshed. Even Fielding, the most sympathetic of the English characters, does not argue that the

British should leave India. However, the British lack any ability to question their own basic assumptions about race and Empire, and as such they become the objects of Forster's biting satire: The British claim to be in India for the good of the Indians, whereas in fact, they are there to increase their own wealth by setting up a system of trade that is entirely beneficial to themselves. In terms of culture clash, the English, schooled in a fairly simple version of Christianity, are unable to understand the mysterious spirituality of India. Mrs. Moore shows some interest in the topic when she first arrives in the country. She likes the idea of "resignation"-being passively resigned to the will of God-which she associates with Indian thought. She is also attracted to the unity of everything in the universe, another idea she associates with India. But the incident in the caves, when she hears the echo, unnerves her. The echo annihilates all distinctions in the name of the unity of life, and also annihilates distinctions between good and evil. This is far from the Christian view of life, at least in Mrs. Moore's view, and leads her into despair and apathy.

The clash of cultures can be seen not only in Mrs. Moore's response to India but also in Fielding's. Fielding does not believe in God and therefore has no interest in the contrast between Eastern and Western spirituality, but nonetheless, as chapter 32 shows, he feels far more at home with the forms of Western architecture he encounters in Venice than with the temples of India. The temples represent to him merely the "muddle" of India, whereas Western architecture presents him with a view of "the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them, the civilization that has escaped muddle, the spirit in a reasonable form, with flesh and blood subsisting."

In a word, the bridge over cultures is hinted even in the title: *A Passage to India*, but the passage remains dark, dangerous and uncertain. The gate is strait and the way is narrow, echoing rich religious and cultural overtones.

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