

Beyond the Binary of Self and Other: Analysing Cross-Cultural Human Values and Subaltern Identity in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India

Miss. Megha Mahendra Gavade

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Assistant Professor, Department of English, Prof. Dr. N. D. Patil Mahavidhyalya, Malkapur.

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Address for correspondence:
Megha Mahendra Gavade
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Prof. Dr. N. D. Patil Mahavidhyalya Malkapur..

Abstract

This paper explores the nature of cross-cultural human values in the E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. While universal values such as integrity, compassion, and fairness are essential to human relations, Forster's novel shows how these values are often restricted by Orientalist stereotypes and the rigid binary of the Colonizer (Self) and the Colonized (Other). By focusing on the complex friendship between Cyril Fielding and Dr. Aziz, this study examines whether true human connection is possible when one culture holds systemic power over another. It further integrates Subaltern Studies by analyzing how Indian subjects seek dignity and justice in a social framework that views them through a lens of prejudice. The paper concludes that while human values are universal, their successful transmission requires the dismantling of cultural hierarchies.

Keywords: Subaltern Studies, Human Values, Colonialism, Orientalism, Integrity, Fairness, Cross-Cultural Issues.

• Introduction: The Complexity of Human Relations :

Literature serves as a mirror of society, and E.M. Forster's *Passage to India*, 1924 is a subtle reflection of the moral, social, and emotional dimensions of cross-cultural encounters. The novel is famously centered on a simple, yet profound question: Can an Englishman and an Indian be friends? In the context of the conference theme, this is not just a political question, but a deeply human one. It tests the limits of compassion and love against the backdrop of British Imperialism. Forster introduces the town of Chandrapore—a divided space where human values are constantly filtered through the Orientalist gaze. This term, popularized by Edward Said, describes how the West often stereotypes the East as irrational, mysterious, and inherently other.

II. The Subaltern and the Binary of the Self vs. Other:

The Subaltern in this novel is represented by the educated Indian middle class, like Dr. Aziz, who is technically proficient but socially marginalized. The British officials (the Self) maintain their authority by creating a binary where they represent order and justice, while the Indians (the Other) represent chaos and suspicion. This binary destroys the human value of Fairness. We see this most clearly during the trial of Dr. Aziz. The British community does not seek the truth; they seek to protect the prestige of their race. Here, literature exposes how easily human dignity is sacrificed to maintain political power. Aziz's experience is a classic subaltern struggle—his voice is ignored until it is filtered through the testimony of Adela Quested, a member of the ruling class.

III. The Symbolism of the Marabar Caves: The Void of Communication:

The incident at the Marabar Caves serves as the turning point for the collapse of cross-cultural values. Inside the caves, Mrs. Moore is unnerved by an uncanny echo that translates every sound into a meaningless noise. This echo represents the failure of language and logic to bridge the gap between cultures. When Adela Quested becomes disoriented and accuses Aziz of assault, the echo in her mind symbolizes the internal confusion caused by living in a colonial society. The caves strip away the polite layers of British social life, leaving behind only fear and suspicion. This moment proves that without mutual trust, the value of honesty becomes impossible to maintain.

IV. Cross-Cultural Values and the Oriental Stereotype:

Forster uses characters like Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding to represent the transmission of culture and values. Mrs. Moore, through her Compassion, connects with Aziz in the mosque by respecting his religious space. However, the novel suggests that individual goodwill is often not enough to overcome the cross-cultural issues of the time. The stereotypes held by the British—that Indians are untrustworthy or that the Oriental mind is difficult to understand—act as a barrier to Integrity and Honesty. Even Fielding, the most liberal character, eventually finds himself pulled back toward his own race. The novel's famous ending, where the earth and sky seem to say No, not yet, is a stark reminder that cross-cultural connection cannot be fully realized until the subaltern is granted an equal footing in the dialogue of human values.

V. The Legal Struggle for Truth and Fairness

The trial of Dr. Aziz is a struggle between institutional power and individual integrity. Fielding breaks with his fellow British citizens to support Aziz because he believes in the universal value of justice.

During the trial, Adela Quested undergoes a moral transformation. Despite the immense pressure from the British community to secure a conviction, her sense of fairness leads her to admit she was mistaken. This act of bravery is a rare example of a human value overcoming political prejudice. However, the damage to Aziz's dignity is permanent. He realizes that in a colonial system, fairness is often a matter of chance rather than a guaranteed right.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, *A Passage to India* remains a vital text for understanding the intersection of human values and literature. It teaches us that human dignity is not a gift to be given by a superior culture to an inferior one; it is an inherent right that is often obscured by political binaries.

By analyzing the novel through the lens of subaltern studies and orientalism, we see that the lack of connection Forster describes is actually a failure of cross-cultural empathy. For the values of fairness and justice to prevail, literature suggests we must first look past the stereotypes of the other and recognize the shared social consciousness that connects all humanity.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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