

INDIA THROUGH WESTERN EYES

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INDIA

India is a land with a vast history that has contributed to a rich culture. There are a lot of elements which has contributed in shaping India into the country it is today. By attempting a discourse in this field, the researcher hopes to study the portrayal of India as shown in three books, all of which have been authored by Westerners so as to get an impartial point of view of the nation. The researcher will attempt to deal with the various cultures in India, its history from the days of British Raj, the attitude of the West towards the India and Indians and the various geographical arenas that define India as a country. By doing so, the researcher will attempt to understand the changes that India has gone through in its evolution from an oppressed nation to a democratic one.

The three main texts that the researcher will be engaging with are *A Passage to India* by E.M. Foster, a novel which revolves around the central theme of the complexities of Anglo-Indian friendship; *Freedom at Midnight* by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, which describe the events in the Indian Independence Movement in 1947-48, beginning with the appointment of Lord Mountbatten of Burma as the last viceroy of British India and ending with the death and funeral of Mahatma Gandhi; and *A Strange Kind of Paradise* by Sam Miller, which is a part travelogue, part historical documentation and part memoir of the foreigner as he tries to unravel the real India from its various cultures, mythologies, superstitions and acclaimed relics.

The main objective of the researcher is to add to the field of knowledge already existing in this particular field of study and also to conduct a comparative study of India during its three main phases- the British rule, the freedom movement and the present democratic order. The

researcher will endeavor to capture the picture of India painted by an outsider which might contrast with the views an average Indian would have of his country.

Of the great many books, articles and journal entries which have recorded the transformation of India from a colonized nation to a democratic, independent country, the researcher has chosen a few that has contributed to the research, apart from the primary texts used. Due to the enormity in the number of texts, the researcher has grouped together the texts into different categories based on a few similarities between them.

- On India During the Colonial Rule of The British- *Bearing The White Man's Burden* by

Timothy Christensen, *The British Presence in India in The 18th Century* by Prof. Peter Marshall, *The Remarkable Raj: Why Britain Should be Proud of its Rule in India* by Adrain Lee, *A Colonial Discourse and Representation of India and Indians as a Stereotype* by Muhammad A Jajja are works that describe the rule of British since 1757 for nearly 200 years. These works narrate, in a post-colonial light, the events that took place during the British rule, like the taking over of trade and governance, building of railway and establishing telephone lines etc. They also describe Indians as a community who doesn't care about their commitments, who are ashamed of themselves and their culture, and who are anxious to please the British. Everything that is associated with the Indians is portrayed as coarse and ugly, with nothing to compare to the British sophistication. They have painted, in vivid detail, the class consciousness and the existence of a racial difference amongst the Indians and the British also explaining the plight of the main female characters as each of their beliefs and ideals with strong foundations were slowly being uprooted by the Indian views and ideas. But while these books deal with the events that took place during the British rule, they do not give a satisfactory explanation on how it has contributed to the formation of India as the country it is today.

- The Freedom Movement- *August 15, 1947- From Bondage to Freedom* by Dr. Eugene D'Souza, *From Quit India to Freedom, News Becomes History on the Pages of The Tribune* by Archana R Singh, *Relevance of Mahatma Gandhiji's Ideology in the Context of Indian Democracy* by Dr. Shubanghi Rathi are works that describe the

freedom movement which led to the transfer of power from the British to the Indians after almost 200 years of imperial rule. These texts describe how India was born new as a free country and the vision the great patriots had for the nation. It portrays the utopia that these great men hoped our country would be. Gandhiji's ideas of Swaraj, Non- Violence, voting rights, village economy and equality among all have been described in detail. Also, the democracy of India today has been questioned with mild sarcasm.

Though India is democratic country, today the definition of the same has changed to a certain extent, mainly due to the ignorance and unawareness of the masses. Illiteracy is one reason for this. What we need to thoroughly understand is that democracy lets us use our freedom and we as citizens have to make sure that we use it in a constructive way which will help in the development and progress of the country. India proudly talks of being democratic but citizens should take special care to see that the term democracy is not misunderstood and misinterpreted (Rathi 4).

◦ India Today- *The Princely State of India* and *Five Things We Get Wrong About India* by Patrick French, *A Curzon Without an Empire* by Pankaj Mishra, *Understanding Modern India* by Ralph Buultjens, *On Display Here, Wanted by India* by Cahlal Milmo, *India Country Profile Overview* by BBC News, *Present Day Religion in India* by Dr. C S Shah, *Temples and Monuments in India* by Dennis Jarvis, *The Freedom Trail, Mumbai* by Bhavani Ramesh are journal and newspaper articles that have described the present day India in complete detail, from the politics in the country, to the standoff with Pakistan over Kashmir, to the religious and communal strives to the overspread poverty and corruption. They have also described the various temples and buildings relevant from the time of the British colonization. They also discuss the various religions and cultural differences in the country, and yet how it goes to define India. They discuss how politics is turning into a hierarchy in India and also try to break the major stereotypes the West has about India and its cultural lifestyle.

* On the texts- *Indian Vs British Cultural Aspects in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India* by Oana Andreea, *The Colonialists versus the locals: Friendship in E. M. Forster, A Passage to India* by Glorianne Georgii, *India through British Eyes in E. M. Forster's "A Passage to India"* by Rama Kundu, *A Passage to India: Forster's Treatment of Colonialism* by Ellie Green are researches done on *A Passage to India*.

These works study the various themes like Anglo-Indian friendships, the class differences between the British and the Indians, the use of various motifs, the symbolism in the different geographical locations prevalent in the novel. Although few research was done on the other two works, there have been reviews on these works, like 'A

Strange Kind of Paradise' by Sam Miller by Victoria Burrows and "Book Review: Freedom at Midnight", *Journal of Asian Studies* by James Cameron.

◦ On the authors- *E.M. Forster, Middle Manager* by Zadie Smith, *World and Time: E.M.*

Forster and The Sunday Times by Adrian Barlow, "Author Dominique Lapierre's new book explains love for India" in *The Indian Express*, "This Time for Africa" by Dipanitha Nath in *The Indian Express* are a few articles that look beyond at various other works of the author and his personal life too.

The researcher will attempt to do a detailed study on the way India has been portrayed according to these books by engaging in a qualitative analysis; that is, a detailed reading of these books, trying to understand the way each element has been portrayed, taking into account the time frame in which the works were written. The researcher will then attempt to compare the portrayal of the country as by the three main texts of study and also the various textual data that may contribute to the study. The researcher will attempt to study these texts in a post-colonial light, especially focusing on the social discourse between the colonizer and the colonized and how the rule of the former may have affected the social life of the latter, from his views of life, to his perception of art. The present age Indian's reaction to British relic will also be studied in the same light. The researcher will attempt to understand the role and impact of the

colonizers in the creation of India, and will also attempt a deconstructed reading of the texts, taking into consideration Richard Rorty's idea of words having a meaning only because of the contrasted effect with the accompanying words.

This study seeks only to provide a comparative exploration of India's journey from oppression to freedom today as portrayed by literature. It does not deal with historical theories and other historical or political facts.

As one consequence of the nearly two hundred years of British rule in India a sub-genre emerged in British mainstream writing around nineteenth century, where 'India' constituted the subject. According to William Walsh "India has... figured in the English imagination as experience, theme, and.... even as a metaphor of human experience itself" (Walsh, 1984, 258). During the two centuries of the empire the Western perception of India changed in accordance with the political and cultural trends and developments in Britain and Europe. Their perception of the Indian reality was tainted by their image of India as a country. 'India', the name, became the provider of goods, from ivory chess-board, to Kashmere shawls, jewellery to perfume, things which could be accumulated and taken back 'home' as mark of wealth and prestige, as Addison puts it:

"I am wonderfully delighted to see such a Body of Men thriving in their own private Fortunes, and at the same time promoting the Publick Stock; or in other Words, raising Estates for their own Families, by bringing into their Country whatever is wanting, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous" (Addison, Spectator, 69, vol. 1).

But despite the scorn and superiority shown by the British, (as classically portrayed by Forster), they could not but admire the wonderful and variegated landscape – including snowy peaks, sandy deserts, dense forests, charming sea coasts – the rich variety of flora and fauna, and human forms, the costume, custom, folkways, and culture of its various ethnic groups. But still the mistrust remained. There was a fear in the Western psyche regarding both the land and its people. Forster spends large sections of the novel characterizing different typical attitudes the English hold toward the Indians whom they control. Forster's satire is harsh on Englishwomen, whom the author depicts as overwhelmingly racist and self-righteous. In *A Passage to India* the average Englishman

seems to be seeing 'propaganda' or scheming behind every event, and taking mistrust as their best guide here.

Even as he counts his guests in the Bridge Party Turton chuckles to himself: "'H'm! H'm! Much as one expected. We know why he's here...'" (p. 61). Although hosting the 'bridge party', the Collector cannot forget his official position as the suspicious jailor

"...he knew something to the discredit of nearly every one of his guests, and was consequently perfunctory. When they had not cheated, it was bhang, women or worse, and even the desirables wanted to get something out of him" (p. 64).

India and Indians, especially after 1857, the first wide-spread uprising in India against the foreign rulers, came to be increasingly perceived by the British as a combination of lure and threat. "British opinion was being seriously roused and whipped up in favour of tightening the Imperialist noose around the irresponsible and ungrateful Indians" (Bagchi, 1986, 67).

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.

It is very interesting to note that when casually asked at the Club where the British used to gather, this is in response to Adela's desire to see 'the real India': 'Fielding! How's one to see the real India?' 'Try seeing Indians,' the man answered, and vanished (p. 48). The man's answer here hints that India was given character by its countrymen. Mrs. Moore senses that India is full of "mystery and muddle" that the British cannot comprehend.

The culture clash, however, is not only between Indians and British, but also between two distinct groups of Indians— the Muslims and the Hindus. The narrative makes it clear that these two groups have very different traditions. Dr. Aziz is proud of his Muslim heritage and considers the Hindus to be almost alien. Hindus "have no idea of society," he tells Mrs. Moore, Adela, and Fielding.

At the same time, although he is quite conscious of being an Indian, Aziz has a sentimental affection for Persia, the land from which Muslim culture originally spread to India. In the

book's final section, although Aziz is living in a Hindu state, he regards himself as an outsider.

The first two sections of the book takes place in the town of Chandrapore and at the Marabar Caves, located outside the town. Within the town itself, one can see several localized settings. Te city has three tiers- the first tier is the poverty stricken tier with crumbling houses and no proper infrastructure, but that still manages to run; the second tier has hospitals and parade grounds; the third tier has offices, clubs and gardens for officers of civil duties, that is, the British. When we see the Anglo-Indian officials such as Major Callendar and Mr. Turton and their wives, it is almost invariably at the Civil Station, where the Anglo-Indians live and work. Often they are at the Chandrapore Club, which is exclusively for the Anglo- Indians and their British guests such as Mrs. Moore, and where Indians cannot enter. Although this setting emphasizes the Anglo-Indian's superior social status, it also shows their isolation from the mass of Indians who live around them. By contrast, the Indians are often shown at their own homes or in public places in the first tier ans sometimes in the second tier. Apart from these specific settings, India itself is the larger setting of the book. Indeed, some critics have remarked that India is not only the setting, it is also the subject and might even be considered a "character." Critics have argued about the extent to which *A Passage to India* reflects actual historical and political conditions of the time in which it is set.

During this period the British Empire was beginning to change. This change was most evident in Ireland. In 1916, a group of Irish rebels declared Irish in dependence from Britain and attempted to seize control of Dublin. Although the British army quickly crushed the rebellion, a more widespread Irish independence movement soon arose, and in 1921 the British government signed a treaty recognizing self-rule for the twenty-six southern counties of Ireland. Although the Irish rebellion had no direct effect on British rule of India, the fact that Ireland had gained limited independence helped to strengthen the idea of possible Indian independence in the minds of many Indians. Forster's novel is set during a time of increased tension between the British and their Indian subjects. At the time of *A Passage to India*, there was a significant organized movement for Indian equality

and eventual independence, in the form of the Indian National Congress. Forster does not mention Gandhi or the Amritsar Massacre, but the division between India's Hindus and Muslims is a major concern in the novel. Forster's novel is not only concerned with its own time but also looks forward to the future. The novel hints that the two groups may be able to put aside their traditional differences and live in harmony as Indians, although that did not turn out to be the case. Ironically, today both India and Pakistan have relatively good relations with Britain and the British. So it is likely that Dr. Aziz and Mr. Fielding would today be able to have the sort of uninhibited friendship that is mentioned at the end of the book.

Religion is probably the most definitive factor in the way Indians lead their lives, particularly if they practice Hinduism and this is why the clash between Hinduism and Christianity in *A Passage to India* parallels the conflict between the Indians and the British. Hinduism is best represented in the novel by Professor Godbole, and Christianity is epitomized in Mrs. Moore who comes to India with the kindness and understanding heart of a devout Christian, but then leaves with doubts on her faith.

Perhaps she is haunted into this state by Professor Godbole's strange song and her experience in the Marabar Caves. The state of mind of Mrs. Moore symbolises the mood of the novel after the arrest of Aziz. It is unsettling to witness a woman, so strong in her faith, being ripped down spiritually and emotionally, as is suggested by her behaviour when she refuses to take a stand for or against Aziz in court, though she firmly believes that Aziz is innocent.

The complexities of Aziz's character represents the complexities of Indians as a whole. Forster has tried to portray the average Indian through Aziz. He is impulsive when he invites the British guests to his house, even though he knows that it is not fit to be hosted in. His over analysis into an issue, for instance, he feels Fielding supports Adela so that he can marry her and own the money which she is supposed to pay to him as a compensation; despite the trouble Fielding went through to prove him innocent, Aziz still says that he deserted him. He still has feelings of compassion to Mrs. Moore who did

desert him and not help him through the trial. Through such complex and polar nature that Aziz seems to possess, Forster tries to paint the characters of Indians as a whole.

Forster ends his novel with a vision of the future where India would attain freedom from its oppressors and Aziz and Fielding would remain friends, which indicates the friendship between British and India.

India has since faced a lot in its struggle for freedom; a struggle that is recorded in *Freedom At Midnight* by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins. It describes the events in the Indian independence movement in 1947-48, beginning with the appointment of Lord Mountbatten of Burma as the last viceroy of British India, and ending with the death and funeral of Mahatma Gandhi. The book gives a detailed account of the last year of the British Raj, the Princely states' reaction to Indian independence, the partition of India, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the policies brought forth by Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah for India and Pakistan respectively.

It begins with the arrival of Lord Mountbatten as the Viceroy of India in April 1947 and ends with the last British soldiers leaving Independent India in February 1948 through the Gateway of India. His task was to help ensure the transfer of power to reliable Indian hands. He did this by what the authors call Operation Seduction – using his immense charm to negotiate with leaders of various political factions to ensure the transition is smooth. The personalities that Mountbatten dealt with are portrayed in lucid detail. These include the individual idiosyncracies, habits as well as unique challenges surmounted by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The most critical matter of all was the drawing of the borders, made more difficult by the long standing discord between Hindus and Muslims. There was the core issue of partitioning a country on religious grounds which was bound to have repercussions not only on the lives and livelihoods of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike, but also on the economies of India, Pakistan as well as what would soon become Bangladesh.

The book deals with events often neglected by various other historians; for example, the maps defining the boundaries that separated India and Pakistan was drawn by Cyril

Radcliffe; B.P. Acharya was the editor of the personal papers of Lord Mountbatten; the description of British summers in Shimla and how commodities were carried up the steep mountains by porters each year.

The Partition of India and its effect of the Indians have been dealt with in detail as the authors describe the mass slaughter caused by the misleading of the Hindus and the Muslims by their religious leaders. Millions of people were uprooted from their native places as they migrated laboriously through trains, oxen and horse carts, foot travels etc, and falling victims to bandits and thieves and various diseases along the way. They had to start all over again and set up their lives and families again. An incident described is particularly terrifying, where a canal in Lahore ran with blood and bodies.

After the detailed narration of the painful partition riots, the book slows down its pace and slowly turns its focus towards Gandhi's efforts in curbing the riots (using non-violent means) and eventually the book ends with the Mahatma's assassination.

The research primarily deals with the portrayal of India as given in the three major books discussed. The research does not include the different kingdoms such as the Mughals and Rajputs, and the various cultures and factors influencing it due to the restraint in time.

Through this research the researcher has attempted to draw a comparative study of Indians and India as portrayed by the three books discussed. By discussing the various hardships India had to undergo, be it during the Partition or during the British rule, with the ill treatment the British has shown to the Indians, the collective consciousness of the average Indian today can be explained. And so the research serves its purpose in being an exploratory study of the Indian consciousness existing in the three books of study.

Volume V, Issue II
February 2017

IJELLH
International Journal of English
Language, Literature and Humanities

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
ISSN : 2321-7065

Indexed, Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

Works Cited:

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