



Reinterpreting Imperial-Oriental and Liberal Issues in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India: A Marxist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The current research article highlighted the imperial-oriental and liberal issues included in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India that was considered as one of the colonial discourses. Forster criticizes properly the British imperialism according to the book incidents. To explore the above issues critically, the researcher focused on the concept of hegemony as one of the major arguments of the Marxist approach. This concept was first articulated by the prominent Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci who divided it into two forms namely coercive hegemony and the consent one. In this regard, it is seen that the imperial values were represented by coercive hegemony, while the oriental discussions were represented the consent hegemony. Based on the book events, the British seen themselves as superior while the native Indians are inferior, and this classification comes under the consent hegemony according to the Gramsci's allegations. This research work aimed to reinterpret the imperial-oriental and liberal issues embodied in Forster's book, A Passage to India in the light of the Marxist perspective.

Keywords: Imperialism, orientalism, colonialism, hegemony, liberalism, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Marxist critical approach is considered as one of the major critical theories which has a large influence on the current literary and cultural studies that most of the literary articulations included. Forster as a socio-political well-known writer embodied a lot of the socio-political issues of the English Edwardian era. This period was accompanied with the emergence of most literary schools of thought, one is the Marxism. In this research paper, the researcher investigates the political ideological issues included in Forster's *A Passage to India*. One of the basic arguments of the Marxist approach is hegemony. This term has been evolved by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and divided according to him into two main forms namely the coercive hegemony and the consent hegemony. According to the novel's incidents, it is observed that the conflict among the story's characters stand for both the east (India), and the west (England). These incidents had taken place in Chandrapore (India) during the colonial period.

In this context, Forster portrayed the Indian situation wholly taking into consideration the social, political, cultural, intellectual, geographical, religious and psychological parameters. The conflict that created among the book's characters indicate the critique of imperial-colonial practices performed by the British rulers of the Indian colony represented by Ronny who applied both hegemonies while Mr. Fielding represents the consent hegemony and this illustrated with his good relationship with Aziz. Ronny ruled India using violent instruments such as trials, persecution, oppression, bigotry, racism, murdering, assassination and physical and psychological torture which are considered as forms of coercive hegemony. On the other hand, Mr. Fielding the moderate English character represents the oriental values that aims to enhance the predominated norms using soft and flexible tools such as culture, language, fashion, demographical changes, and lifestyle which are counted as primary features of the consent hegemony. While Aziz the Indian political figure who adopts the attitudes of resistance revolution, liberty, and opposition represents the values of liberalism against the British imperialism. In brief, the researcher explores the issues of imperialism, colonialism, orientalism, and liberalism in the course of the book's incidents, themes, setting and characters in the light of the Marxist perspective.

IMPERIALISM

Colonialism as a movement of predomination and enlargement started around the 18th and 19th centuries and as a school of thought it started around 1950s and 1960s. It is associated with two important phases: voyage of discovery and profit-making trade. The main objective of colonization is to control the other products. Therefore, the process of colonization is the products marketing. The error of economics is associated with colonialism. Rereading European history is necessary to recognize the dimensions, reasons, and goals that stand behind colonialism. Western minds are seen as more intelligent due to their thinking to discover, invent, and explore many things.

Apparently, the most feature of colonialism is the establishment of linguistic imperialism. Through language the colonization can be established. Colonial masters for their domination, they try to establish cultural domination, and this established through language, and this called the linguistic imperialism. Mother tongue, therefore, is informally acquired. It is unconscious where it is learnt without training, articulation, expressing of emotion through mother tongue, so the acquiring of language through training is difficult. The creative purpose of the foreign language is not important. For colonial imperialism creative writing is not valuable in mother tongue but in their own language. Where in fact creative expression and articulation is possible in the mother tongue according to some critics. In the light of this, colonial and post-colonial language is a dilemma. In this regard, colonialist writers found themselves in dilemma whether to use their own language or the foreign language. Based on this, language is the basic thing for colonization to control the other people. They started to establish the aspect of linguistic transcription. Without active support, colonization will not be possible. In this context, Homi Bhabha's work (1994), *The Location of Culture*, is a foundation for colonial and postcolonial split; for example, in the novel, Ronny Heaslop is said to believe how the British are naturally superior and that they are bearers of rational civilization, while the Indians are once again portrayed as savage, wild, and "at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder. Imperialism on the other hand, is a term that refers to the political and economic domination either officially or unofficially. For this, imperialism is the idea by which the colonization is being practiced. Therefore, the imperial instruments of domination taken place indirectly contrary to that of colonialism. The Indian professor of Comparative literature, in her work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* states:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is displaced figuration of the “third world-woman” caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (Spivak, 1999, p. 304).

Language is the most important recall in culture process. For the colonial masters, the first thing they do they kill the language because if the language remains alive culture will be still alive. So, the socio-linguistics and the psycho-linguistics are the basic concepts related to mother tongue. However the most the genius people came from native schools. Creative production of language is essentially depends on the mother tongue. As colonized people, we obliged to learn English. Colonialism makes you to hate your culture, food, eat, habits, traditions of the colonized country. Colonialism tries to kill your cultural identity. Anybody who fails in English and Math’s., he/she will be failed in his life according to the imperial system. English is the instrument of colonialism. In colonialism, the colonized should live in two planes, one is the hatred of his/her language and obliged to learn the colonizers’ language. The other feature of colonialism is the mimicry in which the colonized people imitate the colonizers in everything.

ORIENTALISM

Orientalism is a thoughtful movement that seeks to study the eastern cultural purposefully. It can be defined as the study or rereading of language and culture of the oriental countries in the light of the western point of view. It is the other image of colonization. In other words, orientalism means intellectual invasion. The west created a certain image of east and this is the colonial construction. East is represented by the west but the west is not represented by the east. Orientalists justify the colonization of the other countries considering them as uncivilized and pagan. According to orientalism the east is uncivilized and requires to be educated. It means that the east is not capable to development and it is always depicted as backward. All these allegations called orientalism according to Edward Said He declared in his seminal work *Orientalism* that “The Orient is... its [Europe’s] cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Varisco, 2007, p.60).

Orientalism sees the east as pagan, illiterate, peasant and primitive. Therefore, orientalism describes how the west establishes the colonial and imperial system of the east not just for people’s education. Orientalists have argued that, as Marx said, “They cannot represent themselves so they must

be represented” (Edward Said, 1979, p. xii). So the west established a particular system to rule the east economically, culturally, and mentally. This construction of the colonial discourses established by the west to help them controlling the east. In 1953 Gertrude White (1953) observed that E.M Forster’s *A Passage to India* can be seen as a metaphor for a Hegelian, dialectical approach to the problem of the Other.

Later on, this term has been developed and known as the occident (west), and orient (east). Based on this, whatever is written by the west about the east is right. It can be said that the occident described, defined, and reinterpreted the orient from the western standpoint. Meantime, orientalism opinions, interpretations, definitions, and attitudes made by the occident against the orient. The east is defined by the west as an experienced land. In this respect, Marx described India as a primitive sort of society and it is better to be ruled by the British and not by the Russian imperialism. He means that development can be occurred and this can help to overcome the caste system of India. The eastern people are interested in discussions. Said curtly summarised the imperial agenda, “There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated” (Said, 1979, p.36).

They represent materialism in certain aspects. At the same time, the western scholars initiated the project of neology of the Indian society. It is represented by the western learning of the Sanskrit language to achieve this goal. The managed to achieve this goal by the help of Indian people. It is observed that the French scholars were interested in Marathi and grammar of the language. According to this, the occident and orient are binary terms opposed to each other. Orientalism is a style of thinking in the form of repressing that created opinions, ideas, and images of the non-European culture in rationalized ways. It is necessary to reconstruct the east is the justification that stand behind the colonization. Hence, the postcolonial critics rejected the claims of orientalism because it is the other masked face of colonialism. However, Hegel exhibited a classically orientalist mindset when it came to discussing Africa. He believed that the ‘negro race’ exists in a state of childhood, with no bearing on world history and incapable of conceptualising knowledge, law, society etc.

LIBERALISM

The term liberalism can be known as a dominated ideology of the western society which its roots comes back to the late 17th century. It is accompanied with the political movement of England that followed the civil wars. The British liberalism is considered as the main movement globally and it was top emerged before the First World War. It was reached to large extent after the decline of the Soviet Communism during the late 1980s. “A rich man told me recently that a liberal is a man who tells other people what to do with their money” (Jones, 2009, p.6). Further, it is important to note that liberalism is the highest kind of generosity. Generosity is the right that the majority grants to minorities, making it the noblest cry to ever be heard on Earth.

Liberalism states the consent of government to maintain order and justice as well as the presentation of the essential rights such as propriety. If the government or authority breaks those rules, the citizens have a right to rebel according to the liberal norms. The universality of political laws, a balanced community, and the constancy and predictability of human nature were all defined by liberalism as political laws of nature. Liberals asserted that people could attain social harmony and cohesion of these identified their basically shared interest in maintaining society as a whole. It is observed that the French Revolution (1789) influenced broadly the development of liberalism.

Apparently, “the classical liberalism” climax occurred in the eighteenth century. In fact, Britain can be considered as the society that most embraced liberalism in guiding its growth during that century, much like the USA would in the next. The Declaration of Independence (1776) is a classic statement of the liberal contract theory of government.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and Happiness (Adams, 2001, p. 13).

According to the norms of liberalism, the Individuals are free in the sense that they made their own economic decisions, agreements, and commitments freely, which eventually benefited the entire community because market economies supplied the socially dynamic that guaranteed steadily

increasing wealth for everybody. It includes the freedom demonstration, the freedom of thought and benefits, the freedom of expression, the freedom of change the ruling system, the freedom of striking and protesting, etc. The main objective of liberalism is the contribution in the improvement of people in most their life aspects socially, intellectually, politically, religiously, and economically. So, the working class would be better educated and able to participate in democracy as a rational human beings as a result of improved socio-economic conditions. Liberalism taken place to overcome poverty, disease, and ignorance that are main reasons that stand behind colonialism.

HEGEMONY

Hegemony is one of the most fundamental thoughts of the Marxist approach allegations and arguments. This philosophical term was first coined by the Italian social theorist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Gramsci is considered the greatest social thinker of the Marxist theory after Karl Marx. The term hegemony means a state of domination of authority over an individual, group, or society. It is a form of leadership or supremacy, particularly by one state or social group over others. In this regard, Gramsci discussed the dominance of the ruling class who has the power over the other social classes especially the low class through the cultural hegemony that carries a dominant set of thoughts, attitudes, and interests that are widespread in society. His philosophical arguments about the theory of hegemony and domination have also been widely understood as an essential complement to the Marxist approach. Gramsci's attitudes are concerned with the relations of the peasantry, unlike Marx whose concern was drawn to the relations of the proletariat. Therefore, hegemony defined as,

Political forging - whether through coercion or elite bargaining - and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state, and the concurrent idealization of that scheme into a dominant symbolic framework that reigns as common sense (Laitin, 1985, p.95).

It is a philosophical phenomenon through it the majority of the population agree with the aesthetic values, beliefs, and political ideologies that have been imposed by the ruling class. Therefore, the financial, political, and social elites contribute largely to the enhancement of this dominant doctrine via propaganda, social media, political ideologies, and social institutions such as civil society organizations, schools, places of worship (mosque, church, monastery, temple, and caves), and political parties. These elites portray everything under the ruling of the high class as totally acceptable by the ordinary people in the society. Besides, these elites enhance hegemony by

refusing and alienating those who expect radical transformation

According to the notion of hegemony, everything can be defined as common sense that cannot be subjected to any kind of challenge or question. It is not a permanent phenomenon but on the contrary, it is alternative and changeable according to the situation on one hand, and according to the nature of people who practice hegemony and those who are subjected to hegemony on the other hand. In this respect, Gramsci challenged hegemony as an activity that was constantly in the making. The dominant ideological thoughts are questioned through the real experiences of people, so, these thoughts must be enhanced continually as rituals of natural and common sense from the ruling power. The ruling class formed a framework used as a means of establishing hegemony through coercion, elite bargaining or co-optation, or cultural changes.

FORSTER'S DEPICTION OF THESE ARGUMENTS IN HIS BOOK *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

It is known that the book *A Passage to India* is the Forster's literary work that includes the issues of colonialism, imperialism, orientalism, and liberalism at the same context. It is considered as the mature work that was written by E.M. Forster. He is regarded as one of the English major orientists who came to the east (India) to explore it socially, culturally, geographically, naturally, and intellectually. His repeated visits to India to gather knowledge helped him to write this book. It seems that the writer intently created one of the characters as his spokesman who behaving, and talking on behalf of him namely Mr. Fielding. After the publication of the novel in 1924, as Mohammad Shaheen (2004, p. 3), states in his work *E.M. Forster and the Politics of Imperialism*, the public were divided as to whether the novel was a masterpiece or a political statement.

Based on the book setting, characters, and incidents, it is seen that the above mentioned arguments can be represented through the story characters. It can be observed that Dr. Aziz, the Indian character who plays the role of the book's protagonist represents the liberal values that depend on the resistance of the imperial oppression, where the character of Ronny Heaslop, the British ruler who plays the role of the story antagonist stands for the imperial doctrines that carry the western culture, while Mr. Fielding the moderate English character represents orientalism that relates to both. Forster focuses on what happens to Western ideals when they become associated with the corruption of the British Empire, using the example of Aziz's trial to demonstrate how the

institutions of the Empire's government "contaminated" justice. Forster believes that imperialism is an external, independent force and that the British in India are victims almost as much as the Indians are.

In this respect, Mr. Fielding's character seems near to the writer's character that embraces the same humanitarian values. Fielding's treatment and interaction with both the orient and the occident indicate the balanced attitude that hates the violent resistance and refuses powerful domination. He supports the peaceful means of protesting against the authority and agree with the peaceful instruments to reach their voices. As an educated and noble figure by his job as a teacher and school master, Fielding managed to adapt with the native Indians that represents the eastern culture. Apparently, in the light of the oriental perspective, Fielding sees that there can be created a good relationship between the east and the west, between the black and the white, between the colonizer and the colonized, between the master and the servant, between the poor and the rich, between the educated and the illiterate and so on. He has recognized the nature of people based on his experience as a social worker who establishes good relationships with the surround people.

Notably, his close friendship with Dr. Aziz with his oriental values, Fielding built a good impression of a connection between the colonial authority and their subjects. To understand the citizens' nature, habits, culture, tradition, and social values and behave accordingly is the fundamental task of the orientalism. It is similar to a large extent to the consent hegemony that was articulated by Antonio Gramsci. This new strategy was applied instead of colonization that depending chiefly on the forceful instruments to control people that named later by Gramsci as the coercive hegemony. To cultivate the western culture, religion, habits, fashion, architecture, language, education and values is the major objective of the orients. To change the social norms, and the aesthetic values of the eastern societies is the principal goal of orientalism. The west sees that the east is primitive, illiterate, ignorant, and uncivilized. Therefore, the task of the western imperialism is to civilize the east and educate it. Thus, the story incidents reveal that Mr. Fielding's character plays the role of the oriental objectives that aim to investigate deeply the native Indian values that represent the eastern culture. In other words, the cultural borders between the occident (west), and the orient (east) can be bridged when treating respectably, mercifully and humanitarily. It can be said that orientalism is the flexible copy of imperialism.

On the contrary to Fielding's character, Ronny Heaslop represents the imperial doctrines that depend on the powerful control over their subjects. Ronny's task is matched to the same hegemony mentioned by Gramsci that is the coercive hegemony (predomination using force) or through violent instruments. According to the book incidents, it is observed that Ronny's behavior, interaction, and reaction is different from that of Mr. Fielding because Ronny represents the British imperialism. The imperial tenants aim always to enlarge domination by using violent instruments such as weapon, psychological, and economic warfare, destruction, persecution, oppression, and military means of controlling the other countries under colonization. His mistreatment with Aziz and other native Indians refers to the imperial values that he represents and practically performed to control their subjects. The coercive hegemony that based on the controlling of people forcedly is being practiced by Ronny. Tyranny, arrogance, intolerance, racism, discrimination, blackmailing, and violence are counted as essential features of colonialism. Notably, the pretended trial that has been performed against Aziz when he was accused of raping Adela in the caves imply the imperial strategy to treat the other citizens under their authority. Oppression, injustice, inequality, persecution, terrorism, repression, and so on are regarded as the main practices conducted by the imperial values.

In this regard, the story incidents unfold Ronny's character as the face of the west imperialism. Ronny behaves cruelly with the east (Indians) as one of the imperial values that he thinks his duty to perform regardless the way he treated with. The coercive hegemonic perspective is being carried out by Ronny. According to the Marxist hegemony, the exploitation of people politically, socially, economically, and intellectually. The coercive hegemony means to invest the others' individuals, groups or societies' wealth, fortune, products, labor, location, and heritage through violent tools to threaten the colonized. Violence, threat, punishment, prison, and murder are principles practiced by the imperial representatives that can help them to control their ruled people. Hence, the imperial doctrines that are being represented by Ronny pretends that they came to India to perform their duties toward their subjects by establishing justice, egalitarianism, law and order, keeping peace and security but the opposite occurs. It is clear through Ronny's speech when he declares that "What I say. We're out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them's my sentiments. India isn't a drawing-room" (Forster, 1993, p.51).

On the other hand, the educated Indian character who plays the role of the novel's protagonist, Dr. Aziz represents the liberal values. Aziz behaves according to the liberal principles that give the right for the individuals, groups and nations to live freely without any other's domination. Based on the story incidents, Aziz is the clear example of liberty that most regions of the world seeking for. The feeling of injustice, oppression, racism, intolerance, fanaticism, discrimination, and mistreatment created hatred, spite, and malice in Aziz's heart. This is illustrated in the following words of Mrs. Callendar "The kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die" (Forster, 1993, p.25). This can be observed in the course of the story events when Aziz declares that:

They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any Englishwoman six months. All are exactly the same (Forster, 1993, p.7).

In this context, Aziz represents the spirit of resistance in the east against the west arrogance. Liberty and freedom is the main reason that motivated Aziz to struggle constantly against the British colonization in India. Aziz sees that the existence of the foreigners that is the English empire is illegal and must be expelled. Even his good relationship with the other perfect English figures Mrs. Moore, Miss Adela, and Mr. Fielding could not kill the spirit of resistance for liberation in his mind and heart. According to Aziz, the native Indians must be freed and the British colonization must be ended. Further, Aziz behaves according to the regulations of liberalism that gives the individuals, groups, or societies the right of independence, freedom of thinking, expression, belief, auto-determination, and living against his people. Aziz refused strongly all the colonial practices against his people. Therefore, the British rulers tried to sue him pretended and accused him of committing immoral act in order to deform his dignity and reputation to lose the spirit of resistance as one technique of the colonial plans.

On the contrary, the trial raised Aziz's reputation and social status among his population and increased rapidly his supporters. He has become well-known figure for his fighting against the colonial principles. All the social groups sympathized with him. Besides, this act gave an opportunity to protest and demonstrate against the British authorities as a result of Aziz's sacrifice. He has been taken forcedly to the prison and sentenced for his liberal attitudes. He intended to fight for freedom. Aziz wanted to overcome slavery. Hence, he seeks to make his people superior according to the liberal values. By these values Dr. Aziz resisted the British imperialism

intellectually, socially, politically and culturally. Thus, during his trial, Aziz has become an iconic character that represents freedom. For him, no English man or woman must settle in India and they must leave sooner or later. As an educated person Aziz influenced greatly the public and played the role of the rescuer.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of the political ideological issues in Forster's *A Passage to India* namely the imperialism, orientalism, and liberalism were reinterpreted critically according to the Marxist perspective. Throughout the book, the writer intended to adopt these issues in the current masterpiece that is considered as one of the major colonial discourses. To analyze the book incidents from the political angle is so important task in general and based on the concept of hegemony as an essential argument of the Marxist theory particularly. In this respect, it is concluded that these three political movements were represented by the three major characters of the novel that represent both the eastern culture and the western one. According to the story events, Ronny the British ruler of the Indian colony represents the colonial-imperial doctrines which according to the Marxist theorist Gramsci comes under the coercive hegemony, while the oriental attitudes represented by the British character Mr. Fielding and this matched with the Gramsci's consent hegemony. On the other hand, Dr. Aziz carries the spirit of the liberal values that are seeking for salvation from all the forms of colonization. In short, the researcher reread the story concentrating on the essential issues of imperialism, orientalism, and liberalism through the lens of the Marxist theory.

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