

**Orientalism , the Magic of East , and its Inspiration
on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India***

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Abstract

No doubt that western scholarly works keep debt to the eastern culture .Tales ,stories and traditions all embody oriental ideas from the most distant east . It is the world that influenced much on English literature and literary writers who are , with respect to this influence ,allured of the magic of the oriental thoughts and meanings . Love , passion , magic , imagination , fancy, and other lovely expressions are the main meals in the menu of orientalism that most western writers crave to tackle in their works that consequently opened the way for further studies in the inspiration of orientalism throughout the ages .

This paper aims to shed light on Orientalism as the inspiration of east to westernwriters and how they function this inspiration with its rich material in presenting their own works without distortion or falsification for the oriental ideals .

Actually , to clarify this aim , the research is divided into three sections. The firstsection deals with the morals ,values ,and the identity of Orientalism . The second section tackles orientalism as an inspiration of humanistic relations , while the third section is about the reflection of orientalism on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* .

Section One : Morals , Values , and Identity of Orientalism .

The medieval Arabic literature displays most exalted moral ideas, the deepest reverence for all things connected with its religion and identity . This literature is proud of fate and fortune to include them in its fields even in days of comparative degeneration and local decay. In fact, it is shaped with unlimited humanity and charity for the

poor, unconditional forgiveness, generosity and liberality which all exalt kindly deeds of oriental base. These features are considered the foundation of the Arabic society and indeed the very purpose of its existence. Values of such a culture influenced the stories and even the folktales of other cultures. Courage, honesty, honor, hospitality, generosity, and loyalty are all emphasized. Moreover, the hero is defined by characteristics such as pride , bravery in war, protecting the weak , and helping the poor .

The supernatural element is a very important aspect in oriental literature. Jinn, Ifreet , Giants and Angels are some of the supernatural creatures that appear frequently and sometimes suddenly as in the example of this research *A Passage to India* .

Mostly in oriental tales , there are two kinds of forces that control human beings ; good forces including God and angels , and evil forces as jinn . In addition, oriental narratives lack elements of logic. Events might be clearly presented, but sometimes little details that clarify parts of the story are missing. For instance, in *The Arabian Nights*, the tale of *The Clever Hassan* the hero suddenly possesses a magic ring that helps him in his troubles. There is no mentioning where the ring came from or why Hassan did not use it before.

On the other hand, oriental stories have morals that teach the reader lessons. They present common morals as patience is the key for success, satisfaction and contentment keep out of troubles, loyalty is always rewarded , and stealing is usually discovered and punished . These lessons are meant to enhance and preserve the set of values that comprise oriental culture and make it distinctive.

However, any serious academic attempt to deal with orientalism and its influence on English literature is bound to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1977) that shows there is no more doubt that western scholarly works in almost all fields of study particularly literature keep debt to the eastern culture . In early times and later, the east had a lot to offer to the west perhaps the greatest gift of all was Christianity that pulled England and the west in general from ages of darkness .

Scholars go on in asserting that orientalism served to enhance the quite knowledge about Islam and the eastern world. This

acquaintance may strengthen the resemblance rather than difference between Moslems and Christians as the dogmatic, liturgical and moral bases of the two religions.

To study orientalism means to come close to this special part of the world for this cultural richness though the first concern is not literary but rather political and religious . Eighteenth-century England used the term "Orient" to describe the Middle East, Asia and Africa in which these regions were involved in the commercial ventures that would become nineteenth-century imperialism (WWW.Thorn) . Consequently, the political concern dealt with the social and literally concerns that described in a way or another the real oriental people. Western scholarly works tried to make use of the oriental tales that paved the way to know much about east. No doubt that the tales of The Arabian Nights, which introduced into England in 1704 through the translation of Antoine Galland's French version of the original, included fantasies, social critiques, and eastern morals serving the narrative and intellectual activities of the western desire.

Indeed, oriental material appeared in the literary works of scholars who liberated themselves from the predominant political and religious prejudice against the east and who sought a great treasure in understanding such a culture of that distant part of the world throughout the ages . They declared that the importance of getting knowledge of the eastern nations minds helps to reach perfection and to open a new and ample field for speculation. Definitely, this declaration offers a more extensive insight into the history of eastern figure and a new set of images that future scholars might imitate.

The admiration of the east as the sacred land and as an exotic world of wonder and wisdom was deeply rooted in the western mentality . Actually, to westerners, the east represents an existing exotic mystery by itself, liberating them from the chains of classical traditions and satisfying the west's urge for exotic experience. Simply, it stands as the free flight of the imagination outside the restrictive classical rules. East provides those who are concerned with it with a sense of wonder and strangeness. Magic and supernaturalism mingled

with beauty is often the stimulant that affects this sense. This side of world is in fact a place of mysterious conflicts and opposites as the rediscovery of oneself and the world, a resurgence of wonder and freedom and an attempt to break the limitations of the traditional to go beyond it forgetting time and space and paying no attention to the traditional religious and political life. Besides, the orient represents emotion, primitive nature and powerful passion that show the wild inner sense of man to move freely either in actual reality or on the wings of imagination.

On the other hand, no one can deny the great impact of orientalism on romanticism in which the first was a powerful shaper of the second (W.W. Oueijan) . To the romantics, the east was a model world of exoticism and the birthplace of almost all ancient civilizations and of heavenly religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In fact , the tide between romanticism and east became so strong through several literary writers went a head by fully integrating eastern material into their works shaping their imagination with exoticism instead of merely using it as decoration.

Orientalism in romantic poetry , however , became an essential inspiration for the people of east were the source of exoticism and mystery by themselves . The symbolism of exotic people is represented by the artistic exploration of places and ages to fly unlimitedly. In Book V of *The Prelude*, the orient inspires William Wordsworth with a sense of wonder and strangeness, when by the seashore reading a book, he passes into a dream, in which he finds himself in a waterless sea , a desert , and beholds an Arab Bedouin who bears a stone and a shell in his hands . The stone is to be a book of "geometric truth" and the shell is a book of poetry which prophesies the destruction of the world by a deluge (Ibid) . While the supernatural world was embodied by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's eastern visionary poem *Kubla Khan* . In fact it shows the power of thoughts and imagination that man has . In *Ozymandias* Shelley insisted to show some ideas as remoteness, iniquity and wonder to reveal the emptiness of pomp and false power borrowed from a historic eastern figure to reach a high level of awareness. Yet, the most distinguished contributions to the promotion of orientalism within the scope of

romantic poets were Lord Byron's contribution. In his Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Byron showed his quest towards exoticism and mystery. He found in east the power, wisdom, and life that provide images of beauty. This images though they are primitive, yet lively and beautiful creating a world of allure and strong passion that frees him from formal life of England.

These well-known figures lived the most elementary unsophisticated passionate moments that reminded them that anything and everything is possible in the world and provided them with a more vivid sentiment of the wonders of nature, a more a cute consciousness of the self. To the romantists , orientalism means the returning to the originality coming close to the depth of their souls to discover the true identities . It is the wonderful world of contradictions motivated scholars to discover the hidden beauty and oddity of a culture, which still has much to offer.

Section Two: Orientalism ; the Inspiration of Humanistic Relations

Some writers have adapted the general orientalist traditions to realize their own desires and purposes. According to them, as to E. M. Forster , orientalism is associated with their quest for homo-erotic love . They look upon it as a means of escaping from a painful state of mind and an oppressive society in which the male friendship is condemned and associated with crime, disease and sin. (Bakshi, 28)

Between 1885 and 1967 all homosexual acts were illegal under Section II of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act , known as the Labouchere Amendment .Hence , " against this context of intolerance homosexuals were forced to look outside English society for places and ideas more conducive to male friendship" (Ibid , 29)

Consequently, the journey to the East, where friendships based on sympathy and sincerity rather than on rules of conduct of the Western conventional society, provides such many British writers as E. M. Forster with a sense of release from social and religious taboos that repress passion . They abandon their countries and escape their conventional society in which the virtues of male friendship are unobtainable to the orient countries where they can find the emotional life, the simplicity, love, and the ideal of male friendship. Thus, it is not able that "The Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its

spirituality, its stability, its longevity its primitivity, and so forth

Section Three: The Reflection of Orientalism on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*.

It is an essential fact that E. M. Forster, a contemporary English novelist, deals mainly with middle Eastern themes, he understands the East, India in particular for it fulfils his homo-erotic quests. His first real contact with India was in the form of Syed Ross Masood, the grandson of the distinguished reformer Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who was the founder of the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh. This relationship had its impact on Forster and inspired him to write *A Passage to India*:

My connection with India is peculiar and personal.

It started because I made friends with an Indian, but
for him I might never have gone to his country, or
Written about it. His name was Masood ...

(Quoted in Bakshi, 35)

A Passage to India, like all Forster's novels, displays his creed for personal relation and Forster himself asserts this fact:

It is on the basis of personal relationship that my connection with that strange country rests. I didn't go there to govern it or to make money or to improve people. I went there to see a friend ... the sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me. It was not a tourist's outing and the impression it left
was deep.

(Ibid)

Within this context, Forster emphasizes the fact that many of the racial and psychological barriers, dividing men from one another, are attributed to "the rigid conventions and narrow prejudices shown by man with developed hearts" (Varshney, 44). Forster shows his admiration for those who are not bound by such conventions and prejudices and are willing to follow their hearts and impulses in reaching out towards one another. He uses the political circumstances to heighten his awareness of incompatibility and barriers to love

between men .

Consequently, the political situation provides Forster with a pretext of the British .in India and gives him an opportunity for projecting his theme of friendship. Therefore, Forster constantly strives in his Indian novel to put politics in perspective and carefully negotiate a space for homo-erotic desire .One can say that "Forster's orientalism is merely a device for advancing the theme of homo-erotic love, and is not ultimately its dominant discourse"(Bakshi ,34).

Obviously , the title was borrowed from Whiteman's delightful poem *Passage to India* (1871) . Whiteman composed his poem to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 , in addition to other scientific achievements ; he saw the canal , by linking Europe to Africa and Asia by the shortest route , as the culmination of world communication (Ibid) .

While Whiteman conducted his spiritual tourism to more than India , Forster under took his longest journey to India physically and spiritually . He went there on two visits before writing his Indian novel , and came back equipped with the needed prerequisites for the monumental task . So *A Passage to India* frames the theme of friendship in the context of the British rule of India.

The central question of the novel is presented from the very beginning, " as to whether or not it is possible to be friends with an English man?"(PI ,5) . The obstacles to friendship between the Indians and the English are insurmountable in the political environment of India . Hamidullah , an old Indian man , argues that friendship is possible in England . Whereas Mahmoud Ali , who has known the English only in India , says it is not . Hamidullah became distrustful and feel himself superior to the Indians . The English arrive in India intending to be gentlemen but are told by their countrymen that it will not do . This is only consistent with the character of Adela Quested , who expresses a wish to know Indians and "I only want to meet those Indians whom you (Mr. Turton) you come across socially—as your friend " (PI ,22) .

Adela comes to India in the company of an old woman, Mrs. Moore, the mother of her future husband, Ronny Heaslop , the City Magistrate . Forster shows in the case of Mrs.Moore and Miss

Quoted "how person of tolerance, good temper, kindness and sympathy, by standing a part from the herd emotions of prejudices and contempt, establish the sanctity and sanity of personal relationship in the face of the hysteria shown by the British " (Varshney ,59) . Being liberal, kindly and sympathetic women, they desire to make a remarkable friendship with the real Indians, ignoring considerations of race and warnings of the local Britishers who are contemptuous of this desire and think that there is nothing to know about Indians who are any way an inferior race. In fact the Anglo-Indian people, who used to live in exile for the sake of the British Empire, did not mingle with the indigenous Indian people. They believe, like their representative, the conscientious Ronny Heaslop that:

I am out here to work , mind , to hold this wretched
country by force . I am not a missionary or a labor
member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary
man...we're not pleasant in India , and we don't intend
to be pleasant . We're something g more important to
do.

(PI ,44)

Reacting against this attitude his mother , Mrs. Moore argues that "the English are out here to be pleasant" and she further adds :

Because India is part of the earth . And God put us on
the earth in order to be pleasant to each other . God is
...love...God has put us on earth to love our neighbors
and to show it , and He is omnipresent , even in India,
to see how we are succeeding .

(PI ,45)

Inspite of her son's warning about mixing too much with Indians, Mrs. Moore goes to the mosque one evening and gets into a conversation with Aziz , a young Muslim doctor who finds beauty and peace in the mosque . He shouts furiously that she should not be there but he has surprised to find she has removed her shoes. "Yes, I was right , was I not ? If I remove my shoes , I am allowed ?" (PI , 15) . This Anglo-Indian woman treats both Hinduism and Islam sympathetically and kindly . Mrs. Moore's situation stands for Forster's who is strongly in favor of Indian self-government . While

Mrs. Turton , the virtual leader of the English woman in Chandrapore , can not tolerate those who can put up with Indians or think that they are worthy of mingling with the English ; if they do , like Mrs. Moore and Adela , they must not forget Mrs. Turton dictum : "You're superior to them , any way . Don't forget that . You're superior to any one in India except one or two of the Ranis [Indian Ladies] , and they're on an equality "(PI , 22-3) .

Being snob and the ideal of the Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs. Turton dislikes Cyril Fielding , the Government College Principal , for he is devoid of any radicalism , just like Adela and Mrs. Turton . That is why Mrs. Turton classifies him in a lower position than other Anglo-Indians "Mr. Fielding was not Pukka , and had better marry Miss Quested for she wasn't Pukka" (PI ,23) . As a man of a good heart and delicate nature, Mr. Fielding is different from the other Anglo-Indians. He tolerates and treats the Indian people very kindly ignoring the racial and political barriers that separate men from each other. "The world he [Fielding] believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence " (Ibid ,56) .

In fact, E. M. Forster tries repeatedly to pit the values of personal relations against the political factors that divide men. He, as a result, strives at every stage to dissociate friendship from politics. He makes all the chief characters keep distance from the political situation in India and he depicts them as detached from the political scene of the novel. Aziz expresses his boring caused by the political discussions and says, "why talk about the English? Brrr.....? Why beeither either friends with the fellows or not friends? Let us shut them out and be jolly " (Ibid ,7) . Fielding shows the same weariness with political issues as Aziz : "There they were ! Politics again. It is a question I can't get mind onto, ...Iam out here personally because I needed a job. I cannot tell you why England is here or whether she ought to be here. It's beyond me " (Ibid, 103) .

It is significant that the theme of friendship in A Passage to India is associated with oriental characters belong to muslim culture that symbolized in the mosque, reflecting Forster's own love for Syed Ross Masood . This intimate friendship carries homo-erotic desire which is

expressed clearly in the novel and becomes its main subject. Thus, Forster's emphasis on the friendship Aziz and Fielding is mainly illustrated in all the three parts of the novel which is divided into three parts. Each part has its significance and, according to Forster, corresponds to the Indian seasons of the year: Part One named Mosque deals especially with Muslim India; it represents spring season and signifies "man's emotional nature". Part Two named Cave represents summer season and signifies "man's intellect"; while Part Three, The Temple, represents autumn and signifies man's "devotion of love" (Varshney, 44).

Apparently, Forster's interest in the male friendship leads him to depict marriage as an upper most subject in the novel. He, as a result, emphasizes the supremacy of homo-erotic love which falls outside the boundaries of such conventional relationships as the marriage. In addition, homo-erotic desire in Forster is more concrete than the hollow conventions of marriage; marriage is allied to the pressures for propagation's but it alienates men from one another and their own true instincts (Bakshi, 46). Consequently, marriage according to Forster, separates men from one another and only through friendship can they come together. As a result of that, women characters do not participate in the novel's imagery of beauty and passion but rather the light was shed on the physical beauty of male as shown in the first part of the novel when Forster presented Mrs. Moore as a very old woman and Adela as a plain flat-chest woman.

It seems that Forster's special love for male friendship came as a result of his love towards the fiery characteristics of oriental figures whose passion cannot be hidden and simplicity cannot be changed. The writer here finds something in this region of the world that couldn't be found there in west. He might find the real identity of human being that is distinguished by his instinct as a bond of passion and emotion. Such kind of magic orientalism gives to a lot of writers paves the way to go far with their imagination keeping real debt to the oriental influence.

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