

On Friendship in *A Passage to India*

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Introduction

E. M. Forster is a writer who is difficult to understand in many respects as is often pointed out. His works contain various constituents and have potentiality capable of many interpretations. Katherine Mansfield, his contemporary writer, points out in a book review that Forster seems to hate extremely to commit himself completely.¹ In other words, he seems to hate to be limited by some key word or some particular idea.

A Passage to India, his best novel which is based on his two times stay in India in 1912 and 1921, is especially the work which has characteristics above mentioned.

But it is usual that a writer should take up some particular theme and modulate it in his novel. Forster is not an exception. What is such a theme of Forster's? He states his own basic standpoint as follows:

Temperamentally, I am an individualist. Professionally I am a writer, and my books emphasise the importance of personal relationships and the private life, for I believe in them.²

As is obvious from the statement, his novels have personal relationships as the basic theme. *A Passage to India* is the same. So I want to investigate what he wanted to insist on in the novel from that point of view. First, I will investigate the background of the novel and the characteristics of Aziz and Fielding. Secondly, I will analyze the friendship of Aziz and Fielding. Finally, I will take up the theme of the novel. Before doing this, however, I begin with summarizing the story of *A Passage to India*.

Summary

Aziz, a young doctor who works at Minto Hospital in Chandrapore, is invited to dinner by Hamidulla, a relative of his. Hamidullah is an old lawyer, and one of his fellow lawyers is also invited. They are discussing the problem whether Indians can make friends with the English, when a message comes to the effect that he should come at once to the bungalow of Major Callendar, the chief of Minto Hospital. Aziz stops eating dinner unwillingly and leaves to go there. But Major Callendar is not at home to receive him. Aziz gets angry that Callendar should do

such a thing on purpose. Moreover, Mrs Callendar and Mrs Lesley snatch away his cart. They do not even greet him. They are about to go to the Club. So he starts to walk back. But on his way home he enters the Mosque which he loves and is relaxed, when a Western woman appears suddenly. He thinks she disgraces the holy place of Moslem and blames her. But he is mistaken. The elderly woman, Mrs Moore, is gentle and reverent for the place. She does not look down on Indians. Aziz feels attracted to her. It proves that both of them lost their spouse and have two sons and one daughter.

Collector Turton holds the first Bridge Party for Mrs Moore and Miss Adela Quested, who is the fiancée of Mrs Moore's son. But the party is a failure. So Cyril Fielding, the president of Government College holds a private Bridge Party. He invites both Indians and the English: Dr Aziz and Professor Narayan Godbole, Mrs Moore and Miss Quested. Aziz comes there first of all. Though he meets Fielding for the first time, they soon become friendly to each other and together they welcome English women. Aziz is wound up and talks a lot. Moreover, he suggests that he would invite them to the Marabar Caves, for he does not want to lose in a contest of kindness with Godbole.

After all, it comes that Aziz really invites them to the Marabar Hills, and after some troubles they leave for the Hills by train early in the morning. Fielding fails to catch the train, and is left behind. After the trip from the station on the back of an elephant, all of them try the first cave.

Mrs Moore feels horrified in the cave. What she has not expected is the echo in the cave. The echo begins to undermine her hold on life, and everything in the world seems vain to her now. And feeling extremely tired, she does not want to see any other caves and takes rest. Adela and Aziz leave her to visit the Kawa Dol, the most wonderful cave, with a guide. On their way up, stimulated by the double row of footholds, she recollects about her fiancée and asks Aziz whether he is married. He tells a lie and asks her to meet his wife. Furthermore, she asks if he has more than one wife. But this is an impolite question which hurts an educated Indian Moslem. He lets go of her hand and runs into one of the caves to recover his peace of mind. Adela also enters another cave without noticing the importance of what she said.

Adela goes back to Chandrapore by herself. And when the party except her arrive at the Chandrapore station in the afternoon, Aziz is suddenly arrested by the police. Fielding, joined later with the party, tries to go with him. But he cannot do so because Turton stops him. Turton informs him that those who accuse Aziz are Miss Derek and Miss Quested herself. According to her, Aziz entered the cave after her and tried to do a rude thing. So she hit him with the binoculars. But its strap was cut because he pulled it. And she ran away. In fact, when he is arrested, he has the binoculars with its strap cut off in his pocket. It becomes an

important evidence which will testify his guilt decidedly.

Mrs Moore cannot recover from the shock which she received in the cave. She loses interest in everything—Aziz, the suit, or the marriage of her son and Adela. And she becomes hard to please. At last, she is quite exhausted and leaves India. She dies during her voyage to England.

Meanwhile, the court is held according to her accusation. But in that court Indians cry for Mrs Moore, shouting: “Esmoor Esmoor Esmoor...” Influenced by that cry, Adela is freed from the illusion that she was attacked by Aziz. She admits in the court that she has made a mistake. And she withdraws her charge. Aziz is released. The English suffer defeat and lose their honour. Enraged, they forsake Miss Quested. Only Fielding helps her on whom the English have all turned their backs. Still more, he advises Aziz to abandon the right to the compensation money due to be paid by Adela. Because of those attitudes of Fielding’s, Aziz comes to make a wrong guess about their terms. He suspects Fielding is going to marry Miss Quested. And he becomes alienated from Fielding.

Two years pass away. Aziz lives in Mau. Meanwhile, Fielding went back to England and got married. His wife is Mrs Moore’s daughter, Stella. And now he comes back to India as an inspector of schools in India. Aziz avoids him, but they happen to meet again. The misunderstanding on the part of Aziz is removed. They get back some of their former friendship. But the real friendship is not recovered. Aziz suggests that it should be postponed till India is freed from the sway of England.

1. Background of the Novel

A Passage to India, based on his travels in 1912 and 1921, was published in 1924. At the end of the work, there is a scene where Aziz and Fielding go out on horseback. At that time, Aziz says: “Until England is in difficulties we keep silent, but in the next European war—aha, aha! Then is our time” (p.315).³ From those words we can suppose the time depicted in the novel is about 1910–20.

In those days, India was, as is generally known, dominated by England. A new culture and society was developing in India under the influence of England.

The English who were in India set their countrymen to the main posts for the rule. Therefore Indians were refused from the upper part of political and economical organizations. The English lived in isolated communities as the ruler come from the foreign country. Except for some people, they lived in the detached lot of a city and had some club. In their life and in their consciousness, Englishmen separated themselves from Indians, and there were no integrations made between them. The position of the ruler and that of the ruled were repeated in social relations. Indian intellectuals, though they were under the influence of English thought, culture and education, were in contact with the English always with some distance. But the

new aspect developing in India intensified the horizontal relations or the connections of the middle classes in Indian societies. Though the limitations by the caste system were hard and the provincialism existed, intellectual Indians came to have a great interest in the unification of India beyond the regional, racial and caste restraints against the English rule.

English, the common language brought by the foreign ruler, became the means to unify Indian intellectuals with many different tongues and letters. Besides, the development of publishing business promoted the friendship among people in various regions.

In 1914, England entered into the First World War and India which was under the sway of England was forced to participate. In 1918, the war was ended in their victory. But what Indians got at the sacrifice for cooperation was the destruction of their daily lives and oppression of political activities. The anger of people headed for the limit and movements for the self-government were quickened. Those were the situation about 1920.

2. Friendship between Aziz and Fielding

A Passage to India has the background above mentioned, in which it was very difficult for an Englishman and an Indian to be real friends. But Forster dared to take up the problem whether they could make friends in such a situation. That is obvious from the beginning of the chapter 2: “[T]hey were discussing as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman” (p.33). And he tried to solve the problem by means of describing the interchange of two characters, Aziz and Fielding.

As for Aziz, he is fundamentally a racist. But when he first meets Mrs Moore in the Mosque, he is impressed by her personality and says: “‘Oh, can I do you some service now or at any time?’” (p.42). It shows that, if there is a person who sympathizes with him, he has the flexibility to be friendly beyond race, color or sex.

Fielding has a belief as follows: “The world ... is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence” (p.80). He is a man who believes in education and is very optimistic on personal relationships. He is different from other Anglo-Indians and does not have racial prejudices and tries to associate with any Indian.

Since they are as above mentioned, even when they first meet, Fielding receives Aziz with the same manner as he shows toward his countrymen, and Aziz on his part gives Fielding the collar-stud which he wears at the time. Thus they make friends with each other immediately. And then, their friendship becomes closer so far as Fielding visits sick Aziz in his bed and Aziz shows him a picture of his wife's. Forster concludes about their friendship at the end of Part 1 as follows:

“But they were friends, brothers. That part was settled, their compact had been subscribed by the photograph, they trusted one another, affection had triumphed for once in a way” (p.133).

But their friendship which is not rooted in common culture and race is, as it were, superficial. So Forster dares to give them a trial and investigates whether the friendship can be fully achieved in that situation.

Then, what is the trial? It begins when Aziz invites newly-arrived Englishwomen, who want to know real India, to the mysterious Marabar Caves at his own expense. Forster does not describe what really happens to Miss Adela Quested in the second cave. But, anyway, one of his main guests is panicked, rushes out of the cave and runs away. Later she charges Aziz with his attempt to violate her.

As stated above, the time of the novel was when relationships between the English and Indians were becoming very tense. In such a situation, the suit naturally causes political and racial conflict between the ruling English and the ruled Indians. At the same time, it influences the friendship which is nearly achieved between Aziz and Fielding in Part 1.

When Aziz is arrested, Fielding believes firmly that Aziz is innocent and behaves on that conviction. He persuades Adela to call off the charge. He withdraws himself from the club and stands for Aziz on the side of Indians. Through the case, he intensifies his feeling of trust for Aziz and, when Aziz is proved innocent at the trial, their friendship is expected to become closer. But it does not.

After he is arrested, Aziz is convinced that Fielding has deserted him because he does not come to see him. (The fact is that he cannot though he wants to.) And the feeling of distrust grows against Fielding, in contrast to the trust of Fielding for Aziz.

Aziz, by nature, often judges things according to his likes or dislikes without thinking reasonably on evidences. Now he believes the gossip that Fielding is connected with Adela, and from that he infers that Fielding has advised him to give up the compensation money because he wants to get married with Miss Quested. Aziz's distrust causes a deep crack in their friendship. And Fielding leaves India without dispelling his suspicion. In this Part, Forster shows how both the Englishman and the Indian cope with the difficulties under the intense emotional stresses and how the situations do not come well for them both.

The novel seems to be completed here at the end of Part 2, in view of its aim and intention. But the novel does not end here, but continues to Part 3. Why does Forster need the Part 3? Concerning that, Forster himself states as follows:

In writing [*A Passage to India*], however, my main purpose was not political, was not even sociological. If anyone cares to inquire what my main purpose was, an answer can be found in the subjoined Introduction by Peter Burra.⁴

And, in the Introduction to Everyman's Library, Peter Burra states:

The intrusion of the English at Mau is incidental and designed only to reintroduce what is the real theme of the book—the friendship of Fielding and Dr Aziz.⁵

We can see the introduction shows Forster's intention of the novel. We should think that Part 3 is to show the conclusion to the friendship of Aziz and Fielding. How is it developed there?

Two years later, they happen to meet again at Mau. And then Aziz's misunderstanding is cleared. But they cannot recover their former friendship. Because Aziz has much distrust of the English generally and is now an enthusiastic nationalist and looking forward to the unity of India, cooperating with the Hindu. We can see that from Aziz's words when he knows that the woman who got married with Fielding is not Miss Quested but Mrs Moore's daughter, Stella. He says: "Please do not follow us, whomever you marry. I wish no Englishman or Englishwoman to be my friend" (p.298).

Fielding on his part comes to think that, now he is the inspector of school in India, he may keep pace with Anglo-Indians and cannot act heroically as he did before. Moreover, he shows his position which criticizes Aziz's racialism, saying as follows: "Away from us, Indians go to seed at once. Look at the King-Emperor High School! Look at you, forgetting your medicine and going back to charms" (p.314).

But when he comes in contact with the innocent and good Ralph, Mrs Moore's son, who has come with Fielding, Aziz recovers his old feelings for his English friends. And friendship with Fielding comes back when a rowboat with Aziz and Ralph collides with that of Mr and Mrs Fielding and they are all plunged into the shallows. Then Aziz realizes how brave Adela was at the court. He takes out his pen and writes: "For my own part, I shall henceforth connect you with the name that is very sacred in my mind, namely Mrs Moore" (p.314).

Thus they recover their friendship. But, as stated above, they are in the situation of the ruling and of the ruled which impede their relation. They cannot help parting at the end.

The end of the novel is rather pessimistic. But it is not that Forster gives a hopeless answer to the question whether the English and Indians can make friends by giving such an end to their friendship. In 1924 when *A Passage to India* was published, he stated that he thinks the personal relationship is still the purest in the world, but that he comes to think men should sometimes part from one another and improve themselves. And that *A Passage to India* is the novel in which he depicted such a parting that precedes the further progress of relationship which he

cannot do now.⁶

Judging from those words, the separation in the novel does not mean an everlasting one. It is a step to the real and deeper personal relationship. Accordingly, he does not deny completely the possibility of real friendship between the English and Indians. He only thinks that place and time are not right for him to answer the question. He wants to leave the answer to future. In other words, Forster thinks that it needs personal relationships beyond nationality and race to keep international relations, and he wishes the world to be realized where we can have deep relationship with any people and any nation.

Conclusion

It seems that Forster saw the British imperialism with his own eyes in his two-times-stay and had an indignation against the colonialism of the English government. So he took up the question whether the English and Indians could make friends in the novel. And though he dealt with various problems which were associated with it, he did not give his answer to that and left the question to readers. But it seems that the question is not a simple one. There is a passage in his essay, "What I Believe", which was published in 1939.

If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.⁷

As we can judge from those words, he takes friendship of personal relation more seriously than patriotism. When we think about what he stated, the question which he left to readers by means of not giving his answer seems to hide a hint that real friendship may be achieved when dominant relations disappear. But even if the obstacle of rulers and the ruled is taken away, will not the difference of sense of values between race and race be left?

In his essay, "India Again", which was published after India had become independent of England, he states:

And turning from myself to people who are far more important than I am, namely to the young, I do pray that young English people who like Indians and want to be with them will be encouraged to go to their country.⁸

It seems that he wants to insist that a passage to real India will not exist unless we respect not only the political solution but the friendship between individuals beyond race and nationality.

In 1945 World War was finished and India became independent of England at

the same time. But *A Passage to India* has not lost its value in spite of the political change. Opportunity has been increased for races that have different culture, tradition and custom to connect with one another. And even at present when words, "international, mutual understanding" or "international peace" have come to be exclaimed, this novel is recognized of its value and is highly estimated again.

After all, that is because the novel suggests that we should cherish the hope for the future of human beings, do our best to have curiosity and sympathy for heterogeneous human races, respect the individual communications and extend the range of friendship beyond race and nationality.

Notes

1. Cf. "Essay on Forster" by Tatsuo Matsumura in *20 Seiki Eibei-Bungaku Annai*, vol.XX Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1967, p.207. Mr Matsumura introduces here Katherine Mansfield's view on E.M.Forster, referring to her *Novels and Novelist*, ed. J.Middleton Murry, London, 1930.
2. E.M.Forster, "The Challenge of Our Time", *Two Cheers for Democracy*, in *The Major Works of E. M. Forster*, vol.1, Tokyo, Honnotomo-Sha, 1994, p.67.
3. All quotations are from *A Passage to India*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Penguin Books, 1936.
4. E.M.Forster, "Forster's Prefatory Note (1957) to the Everyman Edition", in *A Passage to India*, Penguin Books, p.317.
5. Peter Burra, "Peter Burra's Introduction to the Everyman Edition", in *A Passage to India*, Penguin Books, p.327.
6. Cf. "On *A Passage to India*" in *E.M.Forster no Shōsetsu* by Takahisa Kawaguchi, p.168. Mr. Kawaguchi quotes here in Japanese the passage from a Forster's letter in *Selected Letters of E.M.Forster*, eds. Mary Largo & P.N.Furbank.
7. E.M.Forster, "What I believe", *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p.78.
8. E.M.Forster, "India Again", *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p.335.

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