CSCanada
Cross-Cultural Communication
Vol. 9, No. 6, 2013, pp. 61-64
DOI:10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020130906.2882

ISSN 1712-8358[Print]
ISSN 1923-6700[Online]
www.cscanada.net
www.cscanada.org

Separateness and Connection: An Interpretation of *A Passage to India*

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Received 2 September 2013; accepted 30 November 2013

Abstract
"Separateness" is a major problem that concerns Forster. It is throughout his two classics *Howard Ends* and *A Passage to India* and especially the latter one. Man's isolation from man, from God and from himself, is tragic and inevitable. Thus how to "connect" men and themselves is also what Forster ponders on and explores. This paper takes *A Passage to India* as an example to analyze Forster's idea. It is divided into two parts: separateness and connection.

Key words: *A passage to India*; Separateness; Connection

SUN Fang (2013). Separateness and Connection: An Interpretation of *A Passage to India*. *Cross-Cultural Communication, 9*(6), 61-64 . Available from: http//www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020130906.2882
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020130906.2882

INTRODUCTION
A Passage to India (1924) has been regarded as the masterpiece of E. M. Forster, a major English novelist in the 20th century. The novel poses infinite speculations since it is a perfect combination of social realism, philosophic sight and symbolic suggestion. "It has in fact no connection with politics," as Forster pointed out in his essay Three Countries the purpose of writing this book. "Though the political side of the book attracts the readers and makes it popular, actually its concern is much more than politics; it is about human's quest for a rather lasting home and about the whole cosmos."[1] In the novel, India becomes a kind of cosmic symbol, which represents a chaotic, inexplicable and incomprehensible universe. In a universe where "panic and emptiness" are so possible, in a civilization where the vistas of "panic and emptiness" are constantly been enlarged, Forster admonished men not only to "connect" the "pose and passion" in themselves, but, on the basis of such fusion, to "connect" with each other. Thus when mentioning the theme of the novel, Lionel Trilling remarks, "separateness of fences and barriers is everywhere dominant. The separateness of race from race, sex from sex, culture from culture, even of man from himself, is what underlies every relationship." However, Forster seems to feel that man's isolation from man, from God, and from himself, though tragic and inevitable, can, nonetheless, be transcended at the proper times, which is denoted by the festival of live at the close of the book. As for connection, Forster views it should be through inner wholeness, through perfect equality between men and through men's freedom. This paper will focus on "separateness" and "connection".

1. SEPARATENESS
Separateness is pervasive between different races, different societies and even within the same social, cultural and racial group. The gulfs between men are mercilessly revealed through the novel. The most obvious and deepest gulfs are between Englishmen and the Indians. All Englishmen separate themselves from the Indians with their racial prejudice and pride, except Mrs. Moore who changes her attitudes later, however, and Fielding, whose integrity is all-pervasive in the book. Fielding aligns himself with the Indians at the trial of

[1] Forster, E. M. (1950). *Three countries* (Manuscript). King's College, Cambridge.

Aziz—yet even he, when on leave from India he first catches sight of Venice, is refreshed by western order and western style. It seems that some kind of bridge can be built between Mrs. Moore, Fielding and Aziz, with Mrs. Moore and Fielding representing the English and Aziz the Indians. It turns out; however, all attempts are futile.

The novel centers on the wide gulf between the English and the Indians. The development of the plot is around the attempts and efforts to fill these gulfs. There are three such opportunities but all come in vain. The novel begins with Mrs. Moore and Adela's coming to Chandrapore, an undistinguished, medium-sized Indian city. Before coming, both Mrs. Moore and Adela are eager to know the real India. In order to realize their desire, Mr. Turton, the highest ranking British official in Chandrapore, organizes a "Bridge Party" to provide a chance for Mrs. Moore and Adela to know India. This "Bridge Party", however, is definitely not a success for the social and racial gulfs between the English and the Indians who are given their "objective corrective": on one side of lawn stand the English ladies and their menfolk, querulous, distressed at the presence of so many Indians; on one other side of the lawn stand the Indians, embarrassed, some servile, some faintly contemptuous, regarding the disgruntled English with a kind of nervous curiosity. The enmity and lack of communication between the two parties make the "Bridge Party" fail. Even Mrs. Moore and Adela, with all the good will in the world, cannot get much response from the Indians after this pattern of British frigidity has been established. They ask to call on one of the Indian ladies- Mrs. Bhattacharya and are met with a bewildering combination of friendliness and ignorance. The gulfs between the two parties are widened, not narrowed.

The personal tea party held at Fielding's home is the second attempt to connect the English and the Indians. This party is attended by fewer people than the former one, including Fielding, Aziz, Professor Godbole, Mrs. Moore and Adela. All of them are sincerely anxious to exchange ideas and communicate with each other. Fielding and Aziz, who have never met before, become friends immediately. When Fielding accidentally breaks a collar stud Aziz even impulsively lends the Englishman his own. Aziz also finds Mrs. Moore and Adela are easy to talk to. The tea party, turns out to be "unconventional" but successful, unlike the ill-fated "Bridge Party". It is full of warmth and tolerance. Nevertheless, it is added something ominous by the trivial misunderstanding between Fielding and Aziz and Professor Godbole's mysterious song. Then this temporary "connection" is punctured by Ronny, who arrives to pick up Adela and Mrs. Moore. In the course of the tea party, Aziz extravagantly invites all the guests to visit his home one day but changes his idea to invite them to visit the Marabar caves. For he is ashamed with his shabby bunglow. The invitation introduces the central symbol in the book and starts the main part.

The Marabar expedition is the third and last attempt to "connect" the English and the Indians. It is also the most difficult one among the three. It cannot be said to be a success or failure since it turns out to be a disaster: the hatred between the English and the Indians is really out in the open. The two seem to be facing each other across an unbridgeable gulf as they totter on the brink of a race war. The Marabar caves are "extraordinary"—a series of undecorated, twenty-foot, circular chambers with polished walls, each of which is approached by an eighty-foot long tunnel with rough walls. It is here in these mysterious caves that the central and critical event happens. The event brings devastating experience to Mrs. Moore and Adela. Mrs. Moore has a terrifying experience in the first cave. "Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber begins to smell. She losed Aziz and Adela in the dark, did not know who touched her, couldn't breath, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad; not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was a terrifying echo" (Forster, 1979, p.158). The echo in the cave has reduced to a meaningless boum. "Motionless with horror" (Forster, 1979, p.158) and sick at heart, Mrs. Moore loses in a moment all her joy in life, and all interest, even in Aziz. This denotes the breaking of friendship between her and Aziz. Aziz and Adela continue to visit other caves though Adela does not like the caves particularly. Adela's doubts about her forthcoming marriage, plus the frightening emptiness of the Marabar caves lead her to make a feverish accusation against Aziz. This unpleasant incident foreshadows the coming crisis. After the Marabar expedition, Adela becomes ill and accuses Aziz of assaulting her in the caves. Like Mrs. Moore, Adela suffers from the hallucination that Mrs. Moore said: Dr. Aziz never did it." Adela then denies Aziz's insult to her and withdraws the charge against Aziz at the court. Her sensational confession is the climax of the long, dramatic Marabar story which is the central incident of the book, the heart of the plot.

"Caves"—the second section of *A Passage to India* constitutes the climax of the novel on one side due to the setting of the Marabar expedition and vivid character portrayal of Mrs. Moore and Adela who have horrible experiences in the course of this expedition and on the other side owing to the use of symbolism. Aside from his traditional novelist facet, Forster is also modern in that he exquisitely applies the use of symbols throughout the novel especially in the section. "Cave" is mentioned in the first chapter of the noel when Forster makes a description of the landscape of the city Chandrapore. The "caves" are veiled with mystery and allusion. Then in the body part of the novel these caves are attached great importance of description. These caves and its echo are central symbols. Many critics have commented on the symbolic meanings of the caves. Lakshmi Prakash said, "The Marabar caves represent the complex variety of India thought." Therefore, entering the caves means touching a real India.

Forster has emphatically portrayed the caves, the echo and their influence on the characters. The appearance of the caves is dull and common yet these caves are mysterious and muddles, like the disorder of the India culture. The echo in the caves is strange, and nearly everything in the cave has been turned into a sound of "ou-boum". It eliminates any difference in the world and symbolizes nothingness. The Indian culture is extraordinarily unique and particular that it rejects people of other cultures. Shocked by the caves experience Mrs. Moore and Adela later realized that the Indians and the Indian culture are difficult to comprehend less to say communicate with.

After Mrs. Moore's departure from India, it almost seems as though Fielding has come to play the role which Mrs. Moore abandons after her experience in the caveMoore abandons after her experience in the cave—the role of a living bridge between isolated men. His defense of Aziz deepens the friendship between them two. But at the same time the seeds of suspicion have been sown between them, and they will slowly ripen into the hostility on Aziz' part. Aziz becomes upset at Fielding because of the "naughty rumor" between Fielding and Adela. Then Aziz asking for compensation from Adela almost ends the original relation between him and Fielding. Soon Fielding starts his journey back to England. The trial leaves Aziz permanently disillusioned with the English. After Fielding years Fielding and Aziz meet again and ride along. "Why can't we be friends now?" asks Fielding, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want" (Forster, 1979, p.136).

"But the horses did not want it—they swerved apart; the earth did not want it, sending up rocks through which riders pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the Guest House; that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw M au beneath; they did not want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'no, not here'" (Forster, 1979, p.136).

The last paragraph of the novel seems to indicate that Fielding and Aziz haven't and cannot build friendship between them two, symbolizing the separateness between the Englishmen and the Indians at that time.

Even among the Englishmen, there still exist gulfs. Fielding is something of an outcast, a traitor to British imperialism. Mrs. Moore, who becomes a Hindu saint is separated spiritually from her son—Ronny. Ronny cannot comprehend the "religious strain" (Forster, 1979, p.70) in his mother but calls it "a symptom of bad health" (Forster, 1979, p.70). There lacks love between Ronny and Adela, who has planned to marry him. When riding in the car of Nawab Bahadur, a fearful yet not dangerous accident connects their hands together and causes them to have "one of the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom" (Forster, 1979, p.103). With her seeking for the real India, Adela is pronounced "not pukka" by her British fellows and by exonerating Aziz at the trial, she is ostracized by her own people, because of her failure to maintain their anti-India posture. The Indians themselves are also separated from each other. Moslem do not quite respect Hindus; Hindus do not respect Moslems; Jains, Sikhs, other sects all are isolated, unable to communicate.

2. CONNECTION

Forster is considered as a Modernist. Modernism fictions are more concerned about alienation from society, loss of self-identity, loneliness of man, inability to feel or express love, meaninglessness of life, absurdity of the world, dehumanization of the modern society, subjectivity and spontaneity. Not only is the world fragmented, falling apart, but also life. To depict a fragmented life modernists use fragmentation in their writings. The framework in its traditional sense is gone, usual connective patterns are missing, and coming in their place are unrelated pieces or dissociated fragments.

Foster is also a humanist. He tries to pursue connection between human beings in *A Passage to India.* Through his trip to India he discovered culture gaps between England and India and the difficulty of fusing these two cultures. Hazra (1987, p.156) has said, "He (Forster) believed by establishing proper human relationship man can achieve order and peace in this world." Forster has the wonderful desire to promote connection between different cultures and people with various social backgrounds in the same culture, which is also reflected in another two novels—*The Longest Journey* and *Howard End*.

As to how to fill the gaps between the English and the Indians, Forster thinks only "connection" works, connection based on the equality between men, their freedom and inner wholeness. Forster seems to say that only when India is as independent as England will the "separateness" disappear. The subject-colony relationship between these two nations determines their isolation, physically, racially and socially. At the very beginning of the novel, Forster presents us a physical separateness between the English and the Indians. Just outside the city proper of Chandrapore, on a slight elevation above it, is the British colony, consisting of a brick clubhouse and a group of bunglows where members of Indian civil service, live as far as possible from the natives. The club is where only the English can attend and it has not any sense to welcome the Indians. Though the "Bridge Party" is held in the club and attended by both parties, the English stands rather apart from the Indians. The British, for the most part contemptuous of the Indians, and a little nervous with them too, remain aloof, while the Indians, though coming early, stand "massed at the farther side of the tennis lawn, doing nothing" (Forster, 1979, p.58). The gulf between the two groups is physical as well as a social. Arrogant, smug and priggish, the English does not want to know the Indians, not to say to communicate with them. They think themselves superior and contempt to get touch with the Indians. They are rather cold during

the few necessary touch with the Indians. Aziz is bad-treated by Major Callendar, his English superior. He summons Aziz to his home not even bothering to explain why. Aziz becomes friends of three Englishmen, namely, Mrs. Moore, Fielding and Adela. But their friendships are destined to break because of the social, racial and religious differences between them. The well-intended Marabar expedition raised by Aziz turns out to be a devastating experience of Mrs. Moore and Adela and demolished their shallow-rooted friendship. Both Mrs. Moore and Adela have echo after the "frightening" experience in the Marabar caves. Mrs. Moore loses all interest in life, and also in Aziz, and Adela accuses Aziz of assaulting her in the caves. Though Adela withdraws her charge against Aziz later, yet the rift between their relations is irrecoverable. The misunderstanding and suspicion between Aziz and Fielding finally keep them two apart. So it can be seen that the equality and differences between the English and the Indians are obstacles for the two parties to have real communications.

Equality and freedom account much in the "connection" between the English and the Indians but they do not constitute the whole story. The cultivation of inner wholeness is another important factor. The world of the self is shown throughout the novel as like the world of all men, often fragmented, separated from within, chopped into a number of clamorous, discordant bits and pieces without inner wholeness, without inner coherence, there can be no outer wholeness or coherence; "connection", the external bridge, is built up an internal bridge, the emotional unity that comes from self-knowledge, from years of devotion to "the inner life". Forster says that perhaps the little thing that says "I" is missing out of the middle of their heads. And lacking that instrument, lacking the supreme and sane ego which is capable of "connection" and of love, man is, as Mrs. Moore reflects at one point, "no nearer to understanding man" than he has ever been.

A Passage to India is a great work of interpretation which provides profound insights into realities and sharpen our understanding of the outside and inside world. The world outside refers to the society we live and what is inside lies the essence of human nature. Compared with literature of escape, this kind of literature is much more liable to become classic in that what it presented can transcend time.

CONCLUSION

A Passage to India is an epitome of Forster's investigation and pondering on the problem facing all human beings. He seems to suggest that there exists separateness between men, physically and spiritually; even within men themselves, self-wholeness has not been formed. As to fill the gaps between men, Forster suggests "connection": connection through equality and freedom. Self-wholeness, which should be cultivated within men themselves continuously, is also an unneglectable factor in "connection".

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