

**SEARCHING FOR SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF
PERSONAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN E.M. FORSTER'S A PASSAGE
TO INDIA**

Cevdet Yılmaz

Öz

Bu makale, İngiliz yazar E.M Forster'in A Passage to India adlı eserinde, aynı zamanda genel olarak kendi liberal fikirlerini yansıtan bireysel ve sosyal boyuttaki ilişkileri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Romanda, karakterlerin farklı sosyal ve kültürel yapılardan gelmelerine karşılık, sürekli bir dayanışma ve birlik arayışı içinde olmaları önemli bir tema olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Fakat, diğer taraftan, roman karakterleri arasında yakın ilişkiler kurma ve bunları sürdürmeye yönelik olarak gösterilen tüm çabalar, sonunda ırk, din ve gelenek gibi sosyal, kültürel ve politik faktörlerin etkisi ile sürekli olarak engellenmektedirler. Bu bağlamda, romandaki karakterler ve gelişen olayların tasvirinde, genel olarak negatif bir yaklaşımın hakim olduğu görülmektedir. Böylece romanın, bireysel ve sosyal ilişkiler hakkında kesin bir iyimserlik sunmadığı sonucuna ulaşabiliriz. Aslında roman bu konuda kesin olarak iyimser veya kötümser bir tutum sergilemekten çok, evrensel dostluğun gerçekleşmesini oldukça zor kılan konuların ve problemlerin bir boyutunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the intense human and social affairs in E.M Forster's A Passage to India that in essence reflect his liberal ideas as to what life should constitute. In responding to the social and cultural differences between the characters, the search for solidarity emerges as an outstanding theme in the novel. However, on the other hand, the ongoing efforts to establish and maintain these intense relations in the novel appear to be constantly plagued by social, cultural and political factors such as race, religion and tradition.

In this respect, the flow of the narration is marked by the heavy influence of negative mood surrounding the relations as well as the events. Thus, we can infer that the novel can not offer a precise hopefulness about human and social affairs. It is in a strict sense neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but rather reveals one dimension of the issues and problems that render -not impossible, but very difficult- the quest for universal friendship.

Key words

Solidarity, Social and Personal Relations, Social and Cultural Differences

Anahtar sözcükler

Dayanışma, Sosyal ve Kişisel İlişkiler, Sosyal ve Kültürel Farklılıklar

E.M Forster'in A Passage to India Adlı Eserinde Kişisel ve Toplumsal Olaylar Bağlamında Dayanışma Olgusunun İncelenmesi

Introduction

A Passage to India remains one of the most distinguished novels which has hitherto received wide critical attention. The main reason for its success is in essence the striking reflection of the liberal tradition on an unprecedented scale: in its treatment of individual relations, its touch upon cultural and racial problems the book stands as an expression of the liberal spirit. Nevertheless, this liberal world which Forster is at pains to impose on the Indian setting turns out, by contrast, a liberal dilemma. An overall consideration of the thematic polarities in the novel justifies this assumption: the narrative voice and the recurrent symbols project a double vision in which chaos and disorder dominate the inadequate glimpses of an ordered universe. Moreover, Forster's first sentence reading 'Except for the Marabar Caves' and his conclusion of the novel with

'No, not there' effectively suggest the bleak picture of human incapacity within the framework of exclusion and inclusion, separation and unity, discord and harmony.

The event that most acutely tested Forster's liberal humanism was the First World War. As a result, Forster abandoned himself to the emptiness and panic caused by the war. According to Furbank (1979: 161), "he was doubly disturbed by the war itself, and by the inadequacy of his own response to it." It is precisely within those inadequate bounds that Forster's liberalism finds its deep reinforcement in *A Passage to India*.

In this connection Forster's *A Passage to India* proves its ultimate representation of the liberal-humanist tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Forster's position within such historical implications is made manifest in his well-known *Two Cheers for Democracy*:

"I belong to the fag-end of Victorian liberalism, and can look back to an age whose challenges were more moderate in their tone, and the cloud on whose horizon was no bigger than a man's hand. In many ways it was an admirable age..." (Forster, 1972: 41)

Forster's treatment of such a liberal approach in *A Passage to India* apparently has a great effect on discussing individual, social and cultural relations set in the Indian landscape which metaphorically adds up to the construction of the meaning surrounding all the relationships. At the very centre of the relations, on both the individual and social level, lies the fact underlying Forster's anxiety about his humanist ideals such as infinite love, friendship, the developed heart and tolerance (Forster, 1972). In this respect the relations take on different meanings in terms of the plane on which they exist. The characters standing for the "undeveloped heart" are exposed to Forster's criticism, whereas he has all his sympathy with those who feel the necessity to connect. This is significantly displayed in his presentations of Aziz, Fielding, Adela, and Mrs. Moore. The relationship particularly between Fielding and Aziz is essentially of great importance to the thematic development and connection of the plot. Its influence is felt immensely everywhere, making way for various arguments to arise within the context of the ongoing relations taking place in the novel. Not only does it hint at the attempts to connect, but it is also placed against everything that Anglo-India represents. All the possibilities of Forster's motto "only connect", as was cited in his *Two Cheers for Democracy*, are haunted by this sort of contradiction (1972). Moreover, Forster's subject of India, with its clashes of race, religion and culture, poses a serious threat to such possibilities. As for the friendship of the two men, relationships are thus never fully realised. Throughout the novel, as will be illustrated in detail, the forces of alienation prove stronger than those of connection.

The Search for Solidarity with Respect to the Personal and Social Affairs in the Novel

A Passage to India remarkably reveals the culmination of Forster's vision which involves the plight of the human predicament in the universe. India representing this universe offers a vast array of the human diversity, the difference of race, colour and creed that seems to threaten personal relations. The barriers facing the characters in the novel are mostly social and political conflicts; individuals may endeavour to transcend these barriers in an attempt to

solve them. However, their efforts eventually remain insufficient on the grounds that they are overwhelmed by the larger orders of social and political forces. Personal relations are therefore capable of achieving only a purely temporary transcendence over differences of nationality, religion and social status. Not surprisingly, in the end the relationships of Mrs. Moore, Adela, Aziz, and Fielding end in complete disillusion. The characters fail in their ongoing attempts to create harmony, and in turn this forces them “into narrow, isolated cells-Mrs. Moore into nihilism, Adela into despair, Aziz into Islamic nationalism, Fielding into cynical scepticism and Godbole into solipsistic mysticism (Advani, 1984: 2)”. This outlook on the relationships and the general pattern of the novel do suggest that it highlights the collapse of the liberal world which started in 1914.

The novel comprises a complete presentation of parallel and interlocking relationships. The main concentration falls on the friendship between Aziz and Cyril Fielding. In addition to their individual resolution to ‘discover spiritual side’ of the life through mutual intimacy between them, their relationship leads on to a series of social and political invitations towards both union and separation between the groups (313). The spontaneous gesture of affection underlying their friendship involves doing full justice to the polar opposites: good and evil, the positive and negative vision (316). The fundamental factor, on the other hand, qualifying the relationships is in a strict sense determined by the social and cultural differences between the rulers and the ruled, between Moslem and Christian or Hindu. It is evident that rational humanist approaches in the novel are fully attained only after the constant demands of the institutions are set aside. This structural feature inherent in the novel’s plot is pervasive throughout the text and becomes the chief reason for the recurrent ambivalence in characterisation.

The first chapter provides introductory insights into the further comprehensive forms of relationships. Of these it is the meeting of Mrs Moore and Aziz in the mosque that stresses the far-reaching importance of respect and friendship on a personal level, as well as a humanist approach bridging the gap between the East and West. Characteristically this moment of intimacy, which in fact brings the Indian and the old Englishwoman together, relates to the likelihood of establishing a spiritual bond in the personal and social relations in the novel. On the other hand, the achievement of such a spiritual bond, especially between Aziz and Mrs Moore, as Colmer (1967: 23) points out “is not presented at the expense of excluding all these elements that threaten personal relations”. At the centre of this sympathy rather lies an intuitive understanding of other people. This is appropriately how Forster depicts Aziz’s tearful repetition of ‘the secret understanding of heart’ in the novel (42).

In this first contact of Mrs Moore who, like Adela, impatiently wants to ‘see real India’, the relations are deep and promising, but not lasting at all (48). They are inevitably doomed to diminish as they do in life. In this context, Mrs Moore’s desire to find out about more experiences by means of a journey to the caves results in sheer breakdown and degeneration. She is badly affected by an unidentified sound in the cave. This is made clear when Ronny reports that “the sound had spouted after her when she escaped, and was going on still like a river

that gradually floods the plain” (200). Having been deeply impressed by the negative vision she undergoes in the cave, she increasingly comes to believe that “these personal relations we try to live by are temporary” (262). This concern for dissatisfaction is also developed in chapter 14:

“She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage; centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man. And today she felt this with such force that it seemed itself a person who was trying to take hold of her hand.” (147)

This apparent lack of interest in personal relations is equally revealing with reference to Forster’s view of human relationships. For him, personal relations do matter, for people ceaselessly have to grapple with the extreme challenge and conflicts of life.

At the same time this growing negative withdrawal is expressed in the accounts of Adela’s unbalanced mood, after her immediate identification with the conflicts surrounding India. Yet the inevitable outcome of this discovery results in the total dissolution of her involvement with the ongoing relations. Disturbed by the changes that India has brought about in his character, she is confronted by unresolved doubts about marrying Ronny. Although, from the start, it arguably appears unlikely that she wishes to marry Ronny, it is important to notice that she really recognises her incompetence in coming to terms with what she calls ‘the real India’ (48).

In another configuration of humanist conflicts in the novel the problem springs from Adela’s delusion that Aziz has assaulted her in the cave. Adela’s charges against Aziz deliberately invite us to explore their inextricable involvement in ideology. The dominant figure, in this respect, is understandably Aziz, playing a central part in the revelation of difference. For this reason, we are forced to regard Adela’s delusion as the production of an unconscious mind which deliberately comes to associate Aziz with India and Indian life as well. As the problematic confrontations facing the characters uphold, we are made aware that the element of difference culminates in personal upheavals. In this connection, the two sets of relationships, (that between Adela and Ronny, and that between Aziz and Fielding) act as revealing contrasts and parallels insofar as they throw light on “the interaction of reason and emotion, and the divisive influence of India” (Colmer, 1975: 161). Ronny and Adela lacking most of the attributes of a developed heart do not appear to be ripe enough for any achievement of connection. Nor can they strive to rationalise the unknown. Aziz and Fielding, unlike Ronny and Adela, seem, though partly, able to connect and can now and then come to grips with the unseen.

With more concern for the case in point, the difference is made so intensified that it transcends the limitations of Forster’s own liberal humanism. This is appropriately articulated in Fielding’s visit to the sick Aziz. By the same token, this amiable visit marks the humanist triumph of the developed heart, which is contrasted with the breakdown of the undeveloped heart exemplified in the relationship between Ronny and Adela. Also, Aziz makes an emotional appeal to this heightened moment by pouring out his secret feelings about his dead wife. By the end of the visit Aziz discovers that Fielding “was truly warm-hearted and unconventional, but not what can be called wise” (133). 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...” (133).

The paragraph involves a touch of praise to the triumph of affection which produces harmony and connection. But it also places an implicit restriction on the meaning indicating that the understanding reached by Aziz and Fielding is precarious. It is evident that the scenes of harmony, mingled with suspense as such are grounded in the novel, for it aims to build up in the reader’s mind a solid image of double contrast. Thus, we are frequently made aware of the imminent danger of a breakdown in personal affairs.

From the part concerning *Caves* in the novel, this emphasis on the relationships gradually begins to dramatise the dominant theme of separation. Adela’s catastrophic individual weakness, along with the trial of Aziz, and its consequences spin the corroding intercourses in communication. Rony, shortly after Adela’s retraction of her charge against Aziz, comes to believe that the engagement ought to be broken off. In spite of their apparent struggles, both Aziz and Fielding are caught up in the duality of misunderstanding and suspicion. They are overwhelmed by the forces that render them different in character and in outlook. Thus, the fundamental personal difference as an elemental character conveys utterly the author’s interest in the clash of human beings.

Coupled with this, one aspect of the clash, which is also common to the whole group of characters, particularly to Adela and Mrs Moore, is the fact that they can simply “see straight through perplexities and complications” (328). For both Mrs Moore and Adela, it seems that India, manifested for them especially in the Marabar Caves, can offer nothing within the certain parameters of liberal humanism. On the contrary, as Hewit points out, it “destroys the certainties which they brought to Indian and undermines the sense of their own personalities and standards by which they have lived” (1988: 78). As a consequence, they are subject to a pathetic, even tragic experience like Mrs Moore’s death. As for Adela, she has to undergo the torment of the trial.

In essence, Adela’s ordeal partly in collaboration with Mrs Moore’s death produces an immediate effect for Foster, which enables him to lead his characters to a climax of admission. Thus, it comes over in a dialogue as Fielding bids goodbye to Adela Quested. In spite of their concern for individual relations, yet fully aware of the paradoxes besetting them at the same time, their relationship is brought to the moment of assessment. The result is bound to be a reduced universe for the characters in the novel:

“But it made me remember that we must all die; all these personal relations we try to live by are temporary...They feel dissatisfied. A friendliness, as of dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air. Both man and woman were at the height of their powers-sensible, honest, even subtle. They spoke the same language and held the same opinions, and variety of age and sex did not divide them. Yet they were dissatisfied. When they agreed, ‘I want to go on living a bit’, or ‘I don’t believe in God’, the words were followed by a curious backwash as though the universe had displaced itself to fill up a tiny void, ...” (262)

Obviously the paragraph, resonant with the dying words of Adela appropriately attempts to sum up the characters' real intentions about the maintenance of relationships. On the basis of this fact, the relationship between Aziz and Fielding which, after all, seems convincing on the personal level grows increasingly tense. They are in pursuit of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two frequently results in failure.

The friendship between Fielding and Aziz is the novel's chief demonstration that a bridge between individuals might be built. Yet if we restore them to their central place in the novel, we can see that their efforts to sustain their friendship come to resolve into belonging to the group and belonging to the individual. The ending, to be specific, is the story of Aziz and Fielding, with the experiences of the two women providing complication for the plot, which finally separates the two men because they are able to disregard the social and cultural prejudices of their own. However, they do not understand the reasons for the estrangement. In the following scene the eventual doom of Fielding's relationship with Aziz is strikingly specified:

"India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps! Fielding mocked again. And aziz in an awful rage danced this way and that, not knowing what to do, and cried: 'Down with the English anyhow. That's certain... we may hate one another, but we hate you most... We shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then'-he rode against him furiously-and then, he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends.' 'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It is what I want. It's what you want.' But the horses didn't want it-they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it...the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace...they didn't want it, in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said. 'No, not there.'" (315-16)

Of course, one could possibly take it to express a final despair over the question whether friendship can flourish between individuals of different backgrounds and beliefs. The land itself seems to rise up to enforce their separation, and the horses seem to defy their desires. This is a symbolic way of saying that the achievement of friendship involves coming to terms with forces partly beyond their control. But Fielding and Aziz grope for that distant possibility to come to grips with the fact that they have to suffer from their differences "until men know and accept what they hold in common" (Stone, 1966: 328).

Throughout the novel, neither Aziz nor Fielding can push the cultural and individual boundaries marking their friendship. One of the most eloquent demonstrations of these negations is defined by Fielding: "The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence" (227). Yet Fielding himself is unable to retain a sense of friendship with the Moslem Aziz. For whatever reason, politically or psychologically, Fielding is partly prejudiced against Aziz and is aware early in the novel that kinship with him is not likely:

"I shall not really be intimate with this fellow," Fielding thought, and then 'nor with anyone.' That was corollary. And he had to confess that he really

didn't mind, that he was content to help people, and like them as long as they didn't object, and if they objected pass on serenely. Experience can do much, and all that he had learnt in England and Europe was an assistance to him, and helped him towards clarity, but clarity prevented him from experiencing something else.” (129-130)

It is quite evident that Fielding does not seem to “transcend the rationale bias of his personality completely” (Colmer, 1975: 162). What we have called ‘the negative vision’ in the beginning relentlessly defies his liberal humanism. As with the challenge inherent in the novel from the start, the friendship between Fielding and Aziz tends to get paralysed by their insufficient fidelity to basic human principles such as understanding and reliance. At his arrest at the railway station and after the trial, Aziz feels that Fielding has deserted him; subsequently, he demands twenty thousand rupees compensation from Adela. Fielding tries to persuade him to withdraw his demand upon Adela. Aziz suspects that self-interest has prompted Fielding to ask him to give up making any demand upon Adela. During this conversation we learn of Aziz that: *“Imprisonment had made channels for his character, which would never fluctuate as wildly now as in the past.” (235)*

There are also more cases in which suspicion turns into menacing arguments between Aziz and Fielding. Aziz carries to Fielding the rumour that Adela has become his mistress and, in response to this claim, Fielding in a rage calls him a little rotter (263-71). Fielding, then, treats Aziz more like a schoolboy than a friend. Their friendship seems to be so restricted and susceptible that they do not hesitate to show contempt for each other. There is no doubt that such serious problems between them on individual ground have a much larger and deeper significance shaping their different characteristics, both personal and communal, in accordance with their own perspectives.

Yet amid all this negation something often remains of the old relationships. They always strive to preserve the underlying harmony established in the beginning. In conveying such contrasting scenes, the novel offers more visible insights into the effectiveness of individual efforts within a ‘reduced universe’ (Forster, 1972: 41). This is Forster’s focus on ‘double vision’ which is central to the main engagement of the novel (Forster, 1972: 41). In this sense, Aziz is still convinced that for a solution kindness remains an essential asset: *“I assure you it is the only hope... We can’t build up India except on what we feel.” (128)*

However, kindness is not enough to bridge the great race gulf because, as Macaulay (1970: 199) suggests, “race has sucked each of the friends into his own background, they stand in opposed camps, affectionate enemies” (1970: 199). The narrative exposes the countless examples of this assumption, confronting characters with the burden of ideology. It is unlikely that the characters find fulfilment in an emotional affection for each other as long as they are caught up in the overwhelming influence of this ideological force. From this viewpoint, it could be argued, as far as Forster’s liberal objectives are concerned, that Forster is at pains to emphasise the vulnerability of personal relations.

The problem, as we are made to feel, primarily lies in human nature, but in a deeper sense it involves the larger issues of major ideological differences

that make it difficult for people to communicate. On the other hand, the solution to human understanding in Forster's view is heavily based on man's capacity to transcend human difference by developing the heart and the imagination (1972: 41). Broadly speaking, what really matters is the superiority of human values and the relations as opposed to ideological tendencies. It is, as Parry argues, "Forster's consciousness which sends him in pursuit of spiritual communion" (1979: 132). Nevertheless, the relations apparently lend themselves to ideological intrusions in most cases throughout the novel. They characteristically evolve into these poles of the novel's axis insofar as they are ruptured when each withdraws within the boundaries of their own communities.

Conclusion

Finally, all the disagreements among the characters in the novel as opposed to the promises of reconciliation at the outset indicate the novel's reiterated concern with the individual and social relationships through which Forster builds up in the reader's mind an image of double contrast. Thus, the reader is led to acknowledge the consequences of human inadequacy attached to the intense relations in *A Passage to India* despite all the efforts made by the characters to search for solidarity. In the novel, neither the India nor the English minds seem to perceive any coherent and finite order within the endless confusion of India. What they only apprehend is the endless darkness of its confusion. The novel offers no simple solution to human predicament, but after all attempts to explore it at profound level. At the centre of the novel is the wishful friendship of Fielding and Aziz, representing the west and the east, but by the end, they are also held apart by the unbridgeable gulf between themselves.

References

- ADVANI, Rukun. (1984), **E.M. Forster as a Critic**, London: The Macmillan Press.
- COLMER, John. (1967), **E.M. Forster A Passage to India**, London: The Camelot Press.
- COLMER, John. (1975), **E.M. Forster The Personal Voice**, London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- FORSTER, E. Morgan. (1979), **A Passage to India**, Cambridge: Penguin Books.
- FORSTER, E. Morgan. (1972), "Two Cheers for Democracy", in Peter Widdowson, **E.M. Forster's Howards End**, London: Sussex University Press.
- FURBANK, P.N. (1979), "Forster and Bloomsbury Prose", in G.K. Das and John Beer eds. **E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration**, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- HEWIT, Douglas. (1988), **English Fiction of the Early Modern Period**, London and New York: Longman.
- MACAULAY, Rose. (1970), **The Writings of E.M. Forster**, London: The Hogart Press.
- PARRY, Benita. (1977), "A Passage to India: Epitaph or Manifest", in G.K. Das and John Beer, eds. **E.M. Forster: A Human**, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- STONE, Wilfred. (1966), **The Cave and the Mountain**, California: Stanford University.