

## **Symbolism as a Modernist Feature in a Passage to India**

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**Abstract:** - A passage to India by E.M. Forster is a modern novel written in 1924. It describes the modern movement in that period, so we could say that each movement of the human beings has its own characterizations which recognize it from other periods. Forster's novel has its own features which recognize it from other ages in English literature. A Passage to India is one of the novels affected by Modernism which is the movement of that period. It influences the life style and literature.

The main idea of the research is to show the reflection of modernist feature in a passage to India. The reflection of these features has shown through reading and analyzing the novel. It also sheds the light on symbolism, metaphor and personification as literary devices used by the novelist. It also focuses on how E.M Forster uses the modernist features in his novel. It also proves that Forster as a modernist novelist.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Before analyzing the symbolism in the novel, I will give some characteristics of the modern age in English Literature. The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the century. The modern age in English literature starts from the beginning of twentieth century and it follows the Victorian Age. In fact the modern Age really begins with the last decade of the nineteenth century. These writers revolved against the Victorian ideas. This period of English literature is a combination of traditional and the experimental. Symbolism is a main feature of the modernist writers; the writers of this period have used different symbols and images to recognize their works.

The writers of modernist effect by modernism, they reflect the modernism features in their literary against the traditional works. The Modernist writers pervaded objects, people, places and events with significant meanings. They fictionalize a reality with multiple layers, many of them hidden or in a sort of code. Experimentation and individualism become virtues, where in the past they were often enthusiastically disheartened. New images from the developing fields of psychology, political, religious, sciences and sociology have been appeared. New theories of electromagnetism and significant physics have used by modernist authors. A growing critique of British imperialism and the ideology of empire can be reflected in their works. They have reflected the development of new technologies and the rise of mass communication in their works. the extraordinary growing of industrial, technological, scientific, social, and cultural change that arose during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the breakdown of previously held systems of belief and produced an image of experimental reflection of the society .

Edward Morgan Forster is a realistic, traditional novelist in English literature. He was born in London in 1879, the son of an architect. He was educated at Tongridge School and later at King's College, Cambridge, where he enjoyed the free academic atmosphere there. Most of his work is concerned with ways of discovering a quality in personal relationship amid the complexities and distortions of modern life. And he also emphasized the importance of harmony between spiritual life and material civilization and the need of mutual understanding in human relationships, which was very well presented in his novels. In 1912 and 1922, Forster visited India twice, and out of his personal experience of the two trips, he wrote his last and best novel A Passage to India.

Forster is one of the modernist writers. He reflects the modernism in his literary works. He uses symbols to give additional meaning to his novel. Using such symbols help the reader to understand the literary work in an easy way. He uses the symbols through his novel to prove points that otherwise would have had the same or intended effect on the reader. The novel contains a great amount of symbolism, but there are four main symbols; the cave, the sky, the green bird and wasp. Being a modernist novelist, Forster has used those symbols to give a clear and deep meaning through objects.

#### **1.2 Symbolism**

Symbolism is a literary device used in literature to help the reader to understand a literary work by giving additional meaning. In literature, authors often use different symbols to represent a particular concept. Throughout various forms of literature, the following symbols might be used to create meaning in a story. When used as a literary device, symbolism means to imbue objects with a certain meaning that is different from their original meaning or function. Other literary devices, such as metaphor, allegory, and allusion, aid in the development of symbolism. Authors use symbolism to tie certain things that may initially seem unimportant to more universal themes.

### 1.3 Symbolism in A passage to India

A passage to India is a modernist piece of Forster's novel. It portrays the inner life of the Indian society during the period of colonization. It also sheds the light on the complexities between two different societies. It also describes the internal and external conflict between the Indian society and the British one. Forster created his novel on social, cultural, psychological, political clash between different characters. Forster uses different modernist literary devices as symbols, images, alliteration and personification to reflect literary meaning through objects and symbols.

The symbolism in a passage to India is used in a particular way; Forster uses the notion of symbolism in different forms. Once he refers to the cave to give the symbol of aliens, strange and nature. In another way he refers to the echo inside the cave with other symbols. He innovates image and symbols to reflect different aspects in the novel. These symbols and images give multiple interpretations to the reader through reflecting meaning through images. The symbolism in Forster's novel is unique. Forster embodies the symbolism in different meaning and interpretations. Each symbol in the novel represents its own literary meaning, by using these symbols, the reader may get additional meaning through objects.

The most important symbols in Forster's novel is the Cave (Marber Cave). The representation of the cave is clear and meaningful. It portrays the nature and alien images of the earth. It also presents the oldest place in that period. Forster using of these symbols is to show the nature of India as well as the aliens of some characters. It also gives the darkness part of the humanity. It also shows the fear of the future. Mrs. Moore and Adela challenge parts of themselves or the universe that they have not recognized before. The echo of the caves reasons Mrs. Moore to see the darker side of her spirituality. Adela confronts the embarrassment of her realization that she and Ronny are not actually attracted to each other. Hence, the cave in a passage to India has different explanations; it interprets the silence aspects of the universe, it also interprets the destroy meaning when the visitors sound the same sounds. The cave also may symbolize to female sexuality symbol, it characteristics Adela's rape charge to sexual repression. Adela's breakdown results from a failure to make meaningful connections with others Ronny, the women in the Club, Indians and is revealing of the modernist crisis of alienation.

*A Marabar cave had been horrid as far as Mrs Moore was concerned, for she had nearly fainted in it, and had some difficulty in preventing herself from saying so as soon as she got into the air again. It was natural enough: she had always suffered from faintness, and the cave had become too full, because all their retinue followed them. Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. Chapter 14*

The echo in a passage to India has another literary meaning. The echo starts at the caves when Mrs. Moore hears the sound of boom. It is also heard by Adela when she enters the cave. This denial of difference embodies the scary side of the positive Hindu unity of all living things. If all people and things become the same thing, then no difference can be made between good and evil. No value system can exist. The echo plagues Mrs. Moore until her death, causing her to abandon her beliefs and cease to care about human relationships. Adela, however, eventually escapes the echo by using its message of impersonality to help her understand Aziz's innocence.

*There are some exquisite echoes in India; there is the whisper round the dome at Bijapur; there are the long, solid sentences that voyage through the air at Mandu, and return unbroken to their creator. The echo in a Marabar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. "Bourn" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or "bou-ourn," or "ou-bourn,"-- utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "bourn." Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling, which is too small to complete a circle but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once, an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently. Chapter 14*

Forster's usage of Mosque as a symbol in his novel gives additional meaning to his work. Mosque represents Islamic place of prayer that is a peaceful, tactful, but disintegrating holy place. It is surrounded with a low wall around the courtyard, with a stream that runs through the garden and a three sided covered part. Aziz visits this mosque and one night is troubled to see an Englishwoman there. After reproving her for entering the mosque and wearing her shoes inside, he learns of her knowledge and genuine appreciation for the Islamic religion and for India. It may refer to the British colonization when the occupied India.

*"Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems." "I have taken them off." (Chapter two)*

Forster uses another literary device to prove himself as a modernist novelist. The observing of the green bird sitting in the tree is noticed at the time when Adela and Ronny agree to break off their engagement. Neither of them can positively recognize the bird. For Adela, the bird symbolizes the unidentifiable quality of all

of India: just when she thinks she can understand any aspect of India, that aspect changes. Hence, the green bird symbolizes the mess of India. In other words, the bird points to a different tension between the English and Indians. The English are obsessed with knowledge, literalness, and naming, and they use these tools as a means of gaining and maintaining power. The Indians, in contrast, are more attentive to nuance, undertone, and the emotions behind words. While the English insist on labeling things, the Indians recognize that labels can blind one to important details and differences. The green bird suggests the mismatch of the English obsession with classification and order with the shifting quality of India itself.

*"A little green bird was observing her, so brilliant and neat that it might have hopped straight out of a shop. On catching her eye it closed its own, gave a small skip and prepared to go to bed. Some Indian wild bird"* (chapter 3)

*"The bird in question into the dome of the tree. It was of no importance, yet they would have killed to identify it, it would somehow have solaced their hearts. But nothing in India is identifiable; the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else"* (chapter 3)

Being a modernist novelist, he has used another modernist device i.e. the wasp to create a modernist mood in his novel. At the beginning of the novel, when Mrs. Moore comes back from the club, she observes a small wasp asleep on a coat peg. She does not disturb it. Indeed, she seems to feel quite kind toward it, calling it as "Pretty, dear." The wasp is a symbol of the unity of all life, as understood in the Indian religious tradition. Everything, even an insect, is appearance of Brahman. Mrs. Moore does not know this intellectually, but she is sympathetic to the idea of the oneness of the universe. Her reaction to the wasp shows she is in tune with this way of thinking.

*Going to hang up her cloak, she found that the tip of the peg was occupied by a small wasp. She had known this wasp or his relatives by day; they were not as English wasps, but had long yellow legs which hung down behind when they flew. Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch— no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses trees, houses trees. There he clung, asleep, while jackals in the plain bayed their desires and mingled with the percussion of drums. (Chapter 3)*

In the next chapter, the image of the wasp repeats itself. The two English Christian missionaries, Mr. Graysford and Mr. Sorley, are in the habit of discussing the extent to which the animal kingdom might share in divine bliss (presumably after death). They discuss this question with their Hindu friends. Mr. Sorley believes that monkeys might be so blessed, but he is less sure about jackals, even though he thinks the mercy of God might well extend to all mammals. But he is uneasy, as a Christian, about extending this to wasps.

The third occurrence of the wasp image occurs when Professor Godbole is performing the religious ceremony. Into his mind at almost the same time drift the images of Mrs. Moore and of a wasp, two images that "melt into the universal warmth." Since there is no sign that one is worth more than the other to him, this suggests the difference between the Indian and the Christian view of things.

*"One old Englishwoman and one little, little wasp he thought, as he stepped out of the temple into the grey of a pouring wet morning"* (chapter 3)

One more figure of speech is used by Forster i.e. the Sky. It has been mentioned in every chapter of a passage to India. It repeats in chapter after chapter, sometimes personified to the extent that depictions of the sky almost become characters in their own right. The sky, as the entity that embraces all things, could be construed as a symbol of inclusiveness, but it has also been read as a symbol of the vast expanse of either British imperial control or the inconceivable vastness of India itself.

*"As she spoke, the sky to the left turned angry orange. Colour throbbed and mounted behind a pattern of trees, grew in intensity, was yet brighter, incredibly, strained from without against the globe of the air"* (Chapter 14)

Forster uses other literary devices, such as metaphor, allegory, and allusion as an aid in the development of symbolism. Using the metaphor as a literary device comes as a support to symbolism. Forster gives a lot of metaphor and simile in his novel to give a clear meaning to his work.

*The cave walls were smoother than windless water. (Chapter 12)*

*Flames of suspicion leapt up in the breast of each man. (Chapter 9)*

*The elephant had knelt, grey and isolated, like another hill. (Chapter 14)*

*The train . . . wobbled away through the fields, turning its head this way and that like a centipede. (Chapter 14)*

*Its [India's] houses, trees, and fields were all modeled out of the same brown paste, and the sea of Bombay slid about like broth against the quays. (Chapter 29)*

A passage to India is not free of Alliteration. Forster uses another figure of speech i.e. Alliteration. Using such a literary device in the literary works gives additional and clear meaning to the reader.

*[T]he hot weather advanced, swelled like a monster at both ends, and left less and less room for the movements of mortals. (Chapter 22)*

Personification is another device has been used by Forster. He sometimes turns nature into a character, a wary observer, or a sinister presence, as in the following passage.

*April, herald of horrors, is at hand. The sun was returning to his kingdom with power but without beauty that was the sinister feature. If only there had been beauty! His cruelty would have been tolerable then. Through excess of light, he failed to triumph . . . ; in his yellowy-white overflow not only matter, but brightness itself lay drowned. He was not the unattainable friend, either of men or birds or other suns, he was not the eternal promise, the never-withdrawn suggestion that haunts our consciousness; he was merely a creature, like the rest, and so debarred of glory. (Chapter 10)*

*The assemblage of caves, ten in all, shifted a little as the train crept past them, as if observing its arrival. (Chapter 14)*

Forster personifies nature to highlight the mystery of India and the failure of the logical British mind to appreciate it. For example, in the following passage about India's remarkable false sunrise, Adela Quested attempts to explain it scientifically, then ends up saying that she prefers sunrises in England.

*"The sky to the left turned angry orange. Colour throbbed and mounted behind a pattern of trees, grew in intensity, was yet brighter, incredibly brighter, strained from without against the globe of air. They awaited the miracle. But the supreme moment, when night should have died and day lived, nothing occurred. It was as if virtue had failed in the celestial fount. The hues in the east decayed, the hills seemed dimmer though in fact better lit, and a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why, when the chamber was prepared, did the bridegroom not enter with trumpets and shawms, as humanity expects? The sun rose without splendour. He was presently observed trailing yellowish behind the trees, or against insipid sky, and touching the bodies already at work in the fields. (Chapter 14)*

One more metaphor and personification has been used by Forster i.e. the British inability to understand India. It also may be an allusion to Indian disenchantment with Indian rules. The literary words (stabbing and purple throat) may represent different meanings . Throughout history, purple whose hues can extend to deep crimson has been the preferred color for royal robes and other emblems of monarchical or imperial power.

*"They looked out at the palisade of cactuses stabbing the purple throat of the sky; they realized that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood(Chapter 19).*

## II. CONCLUSION

It could be concluded that Forster is a modernist novelist. He has reflected the features of modernism in his works in general and a passage to India in particular. A passage to India is not exceptional of using modernist literary devices.

The symbolism in modernism is different from other periods; the symbols in this novel are multi-dimensional, rather ambiguous and meant to be in accordance with its philosophical theme. Forster uses different figures of speech to give a clear and additional meaning to his work. His using of symbolism, metaphor, alliteration, simile, personification and images prove that he is a modernist novelist. The symbolism in a passage to India gives deep meaning to the reader to understand the literary work from different point of view. Each symbol in the novel represents and stands for another meaning. Cave, the green bird, echo, sky, wasp represent .Forster has used those symbols to give a clear and deep meaning through objects, so it could be said that E.M .Forster as modernist writer, he has proved his modernist style in his novel a passage to India by using such figures of speech. By using these kinds of figures of speech, features of modernism, an experimental style and symbols, Forster is considered as a modernist novelist.

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