

Unity in Society: Forster's Visions in *A Passage to India*

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Abstract

A Passage to India presents the issue of the human relationship between the British and the Indians during the colonization era. The clash between two races makes cross-cultural relationship impossible to achieve. Despite the conflict, Forster believes in unity and proposes essential conditions through the narrative voice, suggesting a possibility for unity in a diverse society. Using the critical qualitative method, this study attempts to discover Forster's essential conditions of unity grounded by the theory of human basic values, which are understanding, tolerance, appreciation, and welfare of all people and for all nature. Although the essential conditions are evident, there are some reasons that restrict them, namely racial prejudice, stereotypes, and colonization. Conditions to achieve unity in a diversity as proposed by Forster will never work unless any forms of colonization are abolished.

Keywords: *A Passage to India, Colonialism, India, Basic Human Values*

Introduction

Published in 1924, the novel presents an issue of differences between individuals of the British and the Indians in the society. The main characters in the novel attempt to perform social intercourses, but fail in the end. But, Forster implicitly provides some essential points, suggesting that human relationship between both races is possible in a diverse society. The optimistic idea of Forster implies that human relationship in a diverse society could actually be applied in a real practice. Unfortunately, there are some critics that stand against the idea. Luhman (1997) remarks that each individual will never be entirely truthful in the society, that from it an idea of underestimation about the wholeness can be drawn. In other words, there is no actual and genuine relationship between one another, despite their want of avoiding the society. Through Luhman's idea, Forster's idea of unity is being opposed because of its obvious impossibility in a real practice. In addition to his negativity, Luhman claims that a humanist thinking (like Forster's) is,

"metaphysical speculation and wistful thinking." (p.322). The sociologist implies that the idea of unity is only an abstract idea that has no chance to be applied in the reality; unity in a diverse society is merely a wish without any certainty that it is applicable (as cited in Lee, 2000).

A Passage to India consists of three chapters representing the teleological progression as the story is told in a paradoxical way. The plot is disturbed by a series of digression from the main plot until the end. The beginning tells the reader about Aziz but gradually is averted to the story of two newcomers, the Englishwomen. The plot is eventually mixed up with a mystical idea of India, which is confusing but intriguing (Bennet & Royle, 2016). This study uses the theory of narrative voice where the narrative element of the novel is examined to find the message conveyed. The narrative element of *A Passage to India* appears omniscient as it describes various aspects from different perspectives. The omniscient narrative exposes the inner thinking of each character

and criticizes them. This theory is necessary to understand the occurrences that are being described through the narrative element of the story (Sisakht, 2014).

Nielsen (2004) explains that a story must be narrated by a narrator suggesting that the narrator is separated from the author. But, the study implies that there is a hidden narrator or narrative voice that is vaguely presented in the narrated story. Exposing the hidden narrative voice is necessary to discover the suggested message. By examining the narrative voice, the study aims to reveal Forster's visions of unity in a diverse society as presented in *A Passage to India*.

Furthermore, the theory of human basic values by Schwartz (2012) is used to clarify the essential conditions proposed by Forster to achieve idea of unity in a diverse society. Universalism is chosen amongst the other category of values as it deals with cross-cultural understanding. This value is relevant for analysing the ideas of Forster's unity as the novel speaks about two different races in one society. Considering the diversity of the society, cross cultural value of universalism is the most appropriate tool for drawing out the essential conditions.

Universalism consists of four sub points namely understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. They represent the values pertaining to cross cultural understanding. The universalism value encourages each individual to be aware of others, instead of their personal needs. Schwartz (2012) suggests that the value of universalism will not be recognized unless people see beyond their primary group. There is a possibility that they focus on themselves when get threatened by the need to accept others (Schwartz, 2012).

Discussion

Through the narrative voice in *A Passage to India*, Forster offers some essential ideas of unity in diversity. The encounter of Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz in Mosque suggests one of the essential conditions to unity, which is understanding. Aziz bursts out about his *tonga*

being snatched away by an Englishwoman. Mrs. Moore expresses her opinion over the Englishwoman for being a pleasant lady, which appears in contrast with Aziz's. Instead of being defensive over the differences, Mrs. Moore is described as "*She listened.*" (p.21) and understands if one's belonging is being stolen. The character of Mrs. Moore presents a person that embraces an objective principle in any kind of judgement. When Aziz expresses his irritation about Mrs. Calendar snatches away his *tonga*, Mrs. Moore 'listens' to his opinion, regardless of her different opinion from Dr. Aziz'. The meeting of Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz presents one of the essential points of Forster's unity. Mrs. Moore shows understanding towards Aziz's outburst. She is not being defensive towards Aziz just because he is an India, or her opinion is different than Aziz. Instead she understands the situation that Aziz must face that his belonging is snatched away, which is a rude gesture that an Englishwoman has done to Aziz.

The second essential condition for unity proposed by Forster is tolerance. When Aziz falls ill, his Indian friends gather in his house which coincides with Mr. Fielding's visit. Aziz felt uncomfortable as he does not want to expose his English fellow this atmosphere. Aziz thinks that his Indian friends behave inappropriately and ask unnecessary questions to Mr. Fielding. However, Mr. Fielding sees them as his friends and tolerate their unpleasant behaviour as found in the following citation.

"That frankness of speech in the presence of Ram Chand Rafi and Co, was dangerous and inelegant. It served no useful end. 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...He passed into region where these joys had no enemies but bloomed harmoniously in an eternal garden, or ran down watershoots of ribbled marble, or rose into domes whereunder were inscribed black against white, the ninety-nine attributes of God."
(Forster, 1924, p.132).

The topic of their conversation may not be necessary but unspeakably develops the intimacy in their relationship. Aziz's friends from different occupations and backgrounds interrogate Mr. Fielding about various of questions. Aziz is characterized as a person who wants to please the British, in this case Mr. Fielding. He is particularly ashamed of the interior of his house that is lacking of everything and his friends' interrogation. Although he sees his friends' attitude as unpleasant towards the Englishman, he still sees the Indians as friends. The value of tolerance appears in the character of Aziz. The narrative shows how the Indian sees the conversation is unnecessary and unpleasant, but eventually Aziz realizes that they are friends with differences and tolerates their behavior. However, Fielding appears to be indifferent about if Aziz is concerned about his Indian's house and focuses on the illness of his Indian's friend. Aziz feels the friendship and understanding of Mr. Fielding. The warmth relationship leads Aziz to share his most valuable photograph of his late wife for he trusts the Englishman just like his own brother. There is no judgmental attitude in the narrative, even though they do not share similar views towards something but are appreciative and respective towards each other. These virtues potentially nurture the possibility of personal relation in society.

Other than tolerance, appreciation is also an important condition that is evident throughout the novel. For instance, Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela Quested are invited by Aziz to have a trip to Marabar Caves. The Indians do everything necessary to make the Englishwomen comfortable during the trip. "...no one is enthusiastic." (p. 139) about the trip, including the Englishwomen, but they decide to join. They appreciate Aziz's hospitality in a foreign country. Both of the Englishwomen imply one of the essential values of unity. They have shown the value of appreciation because they appreciate Aziz's effort in taking care everything for the trip to Marabar Caves for them, including the transportation and the accommodation. The appreciation appears to support the chance of unity in a diverse society to really happen in a real practice.

Mr. Fielding who has been supportive to Aziz shows sympathetic attitude toward the mistake made by Miss Quested, the Englishwoman, who has been avoided by her own people. His appreciation is as evident in the following quote.

"He had a natural sympathy for the down-trodden—that was partly why he rallied from Aziz—and had become determined not to leave the poor girl in the lurch. Also, he had a new-born respect for her consequent on their talk. Although her hardschool-mistressy manner remained, she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it; she had become a real person" (p. 272).

Forster suggests that the sympathetic attitude to one another can lead to a harmonious life in the society where everyone shows appreciation toward others and understanding of one's mistake. The last condition suggested concerns with the welfare of all people and for the nature. Mr. Fielding shows his sympathy to Miss Adela Quested who has been deserted by her people as she stands for righteousness. Although the English consider it a must for the Indian to take the blame, Miss Quested takes back her false accusation upon Aziz. Although Mr. Fielding dislikes the accusation of Miss Quested against Aziz, he decides to embrace and shelter her. The Englishman acts in the belief that one human does not live alone in this world, but side by side with others. The explanation of Fielding's enlightenment shows that an individual does not live alone on this earth but with others. It implies a trait of protection for welfare of all people and nature. It suggests that one individual must think outside their primary group and consider about others, and it is one of the essential points that Forster provides through the character of Fielding. Unfortunately, an ironic truth appears that there is no genuine relation between human in society. One is forced to follow the major mind of the society, which shows there is no actually a personal right. This causes an inevitable clash, because there are rebellious individuals that are as assertive as the fixed and unchangeable mind of the society. The example is when Miss Quested is deserted

from the society. The possibility of unity in society is probably reduced because of this.

The following quote illustrates the narrative voice which represents the confidence and the superiority of the British over Indians that Mr. Fielding and Miss Quested disagreed with.

"remarks that the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa—not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm" (p. 214).

Although Forster has offered his essential conditions of unity, there are some reasons that prevent them to happen. There are racial prejudices and stereotypes in the society. The English always puts the Indians at fault, although they are innocent. They blame Aziz for what he does not commit just because he is an Indian. These issues can rob the opportunity of unity in a diverse society because as the conditions proposed will never happen unless racial prejudice and stereotypes are driven out. The key to make those essential points possible is to abolish any forms of colonization. The quote that *"He is the type we want, he's one of us." (p. 23)* suggests that the British maintains their superior position, whereas the Indians remain the inferior.

Despite all the effort to establish meaningful relationships, Aziz rejects Fielding's attempt to continue their relationship as he believes that their friendship will never work if the colonization continues in this country. No genuine relationships can develop based on the superiority and inferiority of the colonizer and the colonized.

Conclusion

Unity in a diverse society sounds impossible, because differences that occur. Conflicts happen between the Indians and the British each time an attempt is performed, creating clashes that strengthen the impossibility of unity in a diverse society. But Forster provides some essential points that

ought to be embraced to achieve unity in a diverse society. Through the narrative voice, there are four essential points that could be drawn out, namely understanding, tolerance, appreciation, and welfare of all people and for nature. Understanding is seen throughout the novel, especially in certain events which show the Indians and the British gathered in one place. When Mrs. Moore encounters Aziz for the first time in the Mosque, the Englishwoman and the Indian are conversing post Aziz accused her for entering the sacred place with shoes on. Aziz apologizes and engages the Englishwoman by bursting out the unfortunate event he faced. His *tonga* got stolen by an Englishwoman, whom Mrs. Moore has a good impression of.

Although Mrs. Moore has different opinion towards the Englishwoman who snatched away Aziz's *tonga*, she does not turn defensive. Instead, she listens and understands if one's belonging is being snatched away. Similar like understanding, the essential point of tolerance is also seen throughout the narrative element of the novel. The value of tolerance, for instance, is drawn out from the event when Aziz's friends visit him in his house because the man is ill. In the moment, everything goes on well as usual until Mr. Fielding enters the room. Aziz worries excessively because he thinks his house is unworthy for Mr. Fielding to enter. Moreover, his friends are engaging unpleasant conversation that ought to not be talked about to an Englishman according to Aziz. The Indian is quite ashamed over his friends' behavior in front of Mr. Fielding. Yet, he tolerates their behavior and still sees them as friends. The third essential point is appreciation. The value of appreciation is implicitly shown when Aziz prepares everything for Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela Quested to trip to Marabar Caves. The British is against the idea by distrusting the Indian, but Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested appreciates Aziz's hospitality. The Indian even provides the transportation and accommodation for the Englishwomen's to feel at ease throughout the trip. Despite of not being so enthusiastic towards the trip to Marabar Caves, Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested join it because they appreciate Aziz's effort. The last essential point is the welfare of all people and for nature. The value is rather

hidden between the narrative lines. It is seen when Fielding has sympathy towards Miss Adela Quested. She is deserted from the society because of her false accusation towards Aziz. Although Mr. Fielding supports Aziz's innocence and dislikes her accusation upon the Indian, he is willing to shelter the Englishwoman. He gets an enlightenment that one does not live alone in this world, so it is a suggestion that human ought to live peacefully side by side with one another.

Forster's essential points of unity are clear and exposed now. But the possibility of those points to be performed is still questionable. The four essential points have a chance, but there are some reasons that prevent them to happen. Racial prejudice and stereotypes are performed visibly by the British

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