

## The Presentation of the Colonized Land in: A Passage to India and Twilight in Delhi

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### **Abstract**

*The comparative research study has been carried out from the postcolonial literary discourse perspective to ascertain that how the colonized land of Indian subcontinent had been presented in the novels: A Passage to India (1924) and Twilight in Delhi (1940), the former is written by E. M. Forster, who belongs to the race of the colonizers and the latter is written by Ahmed Ali, an Indian novelist belonging to the colonized land. The researcher has applied qualitative paradigm and close-textual comparative analysis to draw the conclusion. The data collected from the text of both of the novels were descriptive in nature therefore the qualitative tools like definition, explanation, comparative analysis and evaluation were employed to produce deductive inferences from the vantage point of postcolonial literary discourse along with Eurocentric historical construct. The paper plumbs the depth of social, political, historical conditions of the colonized land of Indian subcontinent presented in both of the novels. The study has two-fold purposes: it does not dichotomize but reflects the point of the views of the writers to what extent they remained objective and realistic in the presentation of the land, where the subjectivity was inevitable for both writers belonging to the colonizers and the colonized.*

**Key Words:** Indian Subcontinent, Postcolonial Discourse, A Passage to India, Twilight in Delhi

India which has been referred as a commodity in English Literature of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century produced in England and America. For instance, “Indian handkerchief” is mentioned in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Mrs. Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) refers to “Indian shawl”, William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* includes Indian

“Cashmere scarves, turquoise bracelets, ivory chess-men and hot pickles”. Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* mentions “Indian knife”. Christopher Marlowe in his play *Doctor Faustus* (1588\*) mentioned:

“I’ll have them fly to India for gold  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl!”  
(Marlowe, 2004:11, *Doctor Faustus*, Act I, scene I)

Men from the farthest equinoctial line  
Have swarmed in troops into the Eastern India,  
Lading their ships with gold and precious stone,  
And made their sports from all our provinces.  
(Marlowe, 2002: 6, *Tamburlaine*, Act I, scene I)

Shakespeare showed the Field of the Cloth of Gold as under:

All clinquant, all in gold, like heathen gods,  
Shone down the English; and tomorrow they  
Made Britain India; every man that stood  
Show’d like a mine.  
(Shakespeare, 1962:5, *Henry VIII*, Act I, scene I)

In Anglo-Indian fiction, India was the land of sadhus, snakes, superstitious masses devoid of reason and full of myth and mysteries. The natives and some foreign writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century tried to bring the real India to light which had remained in backdrop or mere commodity for centuries.

### **The Real versus Imaginary**

Ahmed Ali’s novel *Twilight in Delhi* opens in the city of Delhi. The history of habitation in Delhi traces back to 6 century BC. It had been site of Pandavas Empire’s capital during the epoch of Mahabharata. With the rise of Delhi Sultanates, it emerged as centre of culture, politics and trade route between Gangetic plains and Northwest India. In the last two decades of the twelfth century, Muhammad of Ghor invaded India after conquering Ghazana, Lahore, Multan, Sindh and Delhi. One of his generals, Qutb-ud-din Aybak, dubbed himself as the Sultan of Delhi. The Slave Dynasty ruled India from 1206 to 1290, the Khalji Dynasty from 1290 to 1320, the Tughlaq Dynasty from 1320 to

1413, the Sayyid Dynasty from 1414 to 1451 and Lodi Dynasty from 1451 to 1526. There had been bloody wars among kings; power in Delhi was obtained with the bloodshed and murder as out of 35 kings 19 were slain. In 1648, during the reign of Shah Jahan, the capital of the Mughal Empire was shifted from Agra to Delhi. The British took hold of the city in 1803 and George V declared it as the capital of the provinces, states and areas under the control of the British Government. In 1920, a new capital city, New Delhi was constructed in the south of the old city.

Conversely, E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* opens in an imaginary city of Chandrapore and other places mentioned are also fictional. Stallybrass (1985:10) maintains, "Forster travelled far and wide; that the places he visited included Bankipore (the model for Chandrapore), the Barabar Caves (which suggested the Marabar) near Gaya ... Dewas State Senior and Chhatarpur (joint models for Mau)"; therefore, Foster is at liberty to visualize and make variations or changes while presenting the places, because they are not real therefore free from the strict observance of historical, cultural, and archeological facts. Suleri criticizes this aspect of presentation that perhaps Forster does not incline to glorify the "exotic" land and its geography and archeology; therefore, he begins the novel with a town without description; hence, Forster uses a designing and "anti-exotic" example not to present stereotypical colonialist but an imaginary town with a specific terror and hatred (Suleri, 1992:144).

### **The Grandeur of the Past and the Disintegration of the Present**

Ahmed Ali's opening of the novel with historical outlook of Delhi negates the imperial narrative that the Indian subcontinent had always remained dark, ahistorical, uncouth and devoid of culture. At the same time, he is conscious of different periods/intervals which halted the course of progress in the city: it was "built hundreds of years ago, fought for, died for, coveted and desired, built, destroyed and rebuilt, for five and six and seven times, mourned and sung, raped and conquered, yet whole and alive, lies indifferent in the arms of sleep" (Ali, 2007:4). Ahmed Ali is conscious of the historical past of the city: its glory and downfall, intrigues and counter intrigues, attacks and counter attacks, construction and destruction, development and

disintegration, evolution and decadence. The city has resurrected more than six or seven times after being attacked, ransacked, destroyed and devastated during different historical periods as mentioned above. E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* opens in an imaginary city Chandrapore, full of squalor and dirt that is not washed by the Ganges River; the woods in its surrounding and the people living in the town are made of "mud"; only the part of the town where the Anglo-Indians are living is elevated, clean, washed by the Ganges and it bears wide contrast to the rest of dirty, muddy and unclean part the natives live around (Forster, 1985:29). The socio-economic state of the natives and squalid life style negate all the claims the British India Government made regarding the socio-economic development and progress of the colonized land. All their development seems to be Anglo-Indian-centered and all basic amenities and facilitates are only provided to them, whereas the natives groan in penury.

For Ahmed Ali, Delhi that had remained "The city of kings, monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles" (4) has become devoid of kings; artists are in dire need of patronage and some "old inhabitants" are present in Delhi but they have lost their glory and pride "under foreign yoke" (4). Ahmed Ali implies that the foreign British colonial rule has halted the cultural and political process of the city which is the microcosm of India. The city holds "forts, tombs and monuments, remnants and reminders of old Delhis" (4) to him it is plural, of many periods, of many cultures and civilization therefore it has diversified outlook; "Only some monuments remain to tell its sad story and to remind us of the glory and splendor – a Qutab Minar or a Humayun's Tomb, the Old Fort or the Jama Mosque" (4), these are the unwavering examples of monumental architecture and testify the glory and cultural beauty and riches of the land. On the contrary, Forster calls the Civil Lines "net" of the British Empire and discredits it. "The roads, named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles, were symbolic of the net Great Britain had thrown over India" (36). To name the places and roads after the foreign colonizers is likely to halt and alter the course of indigenous culture and introduce alien element therein. In contrast, Ahmed Ali presents the less developed state of natives in Delhi: the insidious intersecting network of streets and by-lanes narrows further to enter Lal Kuan, from then to Kucha Pandit

and ultimately to Mir Nihal's house at Mohallah Niyaryan (6). The residential areas of the colonizers in Chandrapore, a remote town, are well-organized, facilitated with basic amenities, whereas the natives at Delhi, the mega and central city, are living in ill-organized, less-developed state without the provision of rudimentary facilities.

### **India: The Land of Revolution and Rebellion**

For both E.M. Foster and Ahmed Ali, India is the land of revolution, bravery and sedition. Forster maintains "Generations of invaders" have endeavoured to rule over India but eventually they either surrendered or were exiled by the natives. The monumental cities and towns they constructed are nothing but their "retreats" and "their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home" (136). The Indian land is aware of its problems moreover it knows the trouble of the whole world as well. India invites to "Come" to it "through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal." (136). However, Forster foresees the future of European colonizers same as to their forerunners "who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust" (196). But the facts remain that the predecessors of English came to India and lived there permanently; whereas, the English did not make India their permanent home as Ronny mentions that he cannot be pleasant with Indians because "India isn't home" (49). After trial, Aziz was acquitted honourably and the natives started celebrating their victory over the colonizers. Adela was deserted by her country fellows because she recorded her statement in the favour of Aziz. When Adela came out of the court alone, after being deserted by her race, the native did not pay attention to her. "They shook hands over her shoulder, shouted through her body – for when the Indian does ignore his rulers he becomes genuinely unaware of their existence" (212). For Ahmed Ali, Delhi embodies "revenge in its nature" and it symbolizes "Life and Death" (4); that makes Delhi like burning coals imbued with the fire of revolution, change and rebellion that can burst into flames at any time.

**Depreciation of Historical Places and Physical Infrastructure**

Ahmed Ali presents that despite all pseudo claims of the English rulers in India, they in fact overlooked the maintenance, renovation and preservation of historical places, which indeed were national assets; they however focused on Towers – the symbols of colonialism and imperialism – at the expenses of the development of local infrastructure. John Bright's witty remarks portray the stock gross situation readily comprehensible that only Manchester city has spent much amount just for the provision of single item of water to its citizens than the East India Company has spent "in the fourteen years from 1834 to 1848 in public works of every kind throughout the whole of its vast dominions" (Roger eds. 1869:42). Ahmed Ali manifests, "On the other side the ugly Clock Tower jutted its head towards the sky, and by its side the dull red building of the Town Hall looked drab" (30) it is clear negation of the claims the British India Government boastfully made regarding the development of physical infrastructure in every walk of life; the rising tower, symbol of colonial power and pride, bears striking contrast with the depilated Town Hall constructed for the public and community welfare and services. "Clock Tower" and "Town Hall" are the names which the British India Government allotted to these buildings but their condition is more or less same of buildings of precolonial period as pigeons "settled down on the roof of the Hall and in the crevices of the Tower. During the severe heat of 1911, the wind raised dust across Chandni Chowk and "from Fatehpuri to Fountain and beyond" (90). The summer of 1918 was the hottest one; the government demolished the greater portion of the city walls, as the result air from the mountain-side blew the dust and spread it all across the streets and by-lanes (229); besides the outskirts and hinterland areas of the city, the main parts of the city were not developed and its street, lanes and by-lanes were full of dust which challenged the imperial narrative of launching wide scale development schemes in the colonized Indian subcontinent. If the main and capital city like Delhi is in such a deplorable state, then the development of the farther areas is of far cry! The Jama Masjid looked diminutive and shrunk, and its red-stone plinth and the marble domes all looked grim in the austere light (30). It mockingly rejects the claims of the British India Government regarding the renovation,

preservation and maintenance of the historical places. As the historical buildings were cultural assets of the people, and they were attached with them emotionally and psychologically; therefore, the British India Government left them to decay and vanish so that the memory and attachment with the past can be blotted out.

**Forster Makes India as a Muddle: The Dark East and the Bright West**

E.M. Forster depicts India as muddle, land of strange echoes, adverse to reason, prone to myth or superstition and immersed in strange enigmas and mysteries; whereas, everything belonging to the west becomes clear, pleasant, based on reason and logic and even the slums of west are shown better than the main bazaars of India. Fielding says, "Aziz and I know well that India's a muddle" (79). Any visitor to the Marabar Caves cannot ensure that his experience of visiting caves was happy or dull, nor would he be able to retain the description of the caves and their interior outlook (126). The Marabar Caves were presented as obscure, mysterious, illusionary and dubious. There was routine life but without consequences. Neither thought nor action could take place. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion. India has got wonderful echoes: the strange "whisper round the dome at Bijapur"; Mandu's air blows the "long, solid sentences" which "return unbroken to their creator". However, the echo which prevails around the cave of Marabar is altogether different and "it is entirely devoid of distinction" (144). Mrs. Moore took India as nothing but "echo" and "Marabar Caves" as final. (195). When they leave India, Lady Mallanby advises Mrs. Moore to avoid standing in heat, she responds "We are safely out of the frying-pan, it will never do to fall into the fire" (195). The prevailing felicity during the festival celebration is regarded that "this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form" (258). Besides, India is the land where everything is "unpunctual" (260); moreover, India seems to be standstill and "not to move" (266). Fielding, while being in Mau, says, "it's place of dead" (272); in addition its "Civilization strays about like a ghost" to grope around the ashes of kingdom, its glimpse cannot be found in the "great works of art or mighty deeds"; it lies in "the gestures well-bred Indians make when they sit or lie down" (229). In India people have

much free time and leisurely hours “and now the blessings of leisure – unknown to the West, which either works or idles – descended on the motley company” (229).

Whenever the plot moves from the east to the west, things become attractive, weather pleasant, land welcoming, sky benevolent and reason and rationality rule over the land. When the colonizers leave India and reach Suez, they feel a “social change: the arrangements of Asia weaken and those of Europe begin to be felt” (233). The atmosphere changes in Egypt: “the clean sands, heaped on each side of the canal, seemed to wipe off everything that was difficult and equivocal, and even Port Said looked pure and charming in the light of a rose-gray morning.” (240). Adela proclaimed, “I see”, it was only when they reached “Mediterranean clarity” she suddenly started seeing (240). At his departure from India, Fielding finds: “Egypt was charming” (253); in Alexandria, he feels, “bright blue sky, constant wind, clean low coastline, as against the intricacies of Bombay” (253). In Venice the buildings, mountains in Crete and even Egypt’s filed everything was at right place “whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong” (253); while going in train to the Marabar Caves, Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested feel that “India was certainly dim” even “though seen under the auspices of Indians” (133). Fielding, after living in India, has lost his ability to judge “the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills” (253). Fielding, arriving at Venice, finds, “the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them, the civilization that has escaped muddle. ...” (253). This obscures the identity of India, and establishes the feelings that it is but the land of oddities, horror, disorganization, and free of reason and rationality; where both art and nature seem to be in haphazard state. The India Forster presents is not the “real India” that every newcomer English wants to see. It is because, Mrs. Moore, while leaving India, realizes that she has not “seen the right places” (195). She laments that she never visited “Delhi, nor Agra, nor the Rajputana cities nor Kashmir... the bilingual rock of Girnar, the statue of Shri Belgola, the ruins of Mandu and Hampi, temples of Khajuraho, garden of Shalimar”, thus the real India does not come to the surface, the readers just have the passing looks of Bombay, “the huge city the West has built” (195). It reminds Hegel’s “universal” theory of history”,



which propounded Europe and America at the zenith of the “world history”. This narrative strongly influenced both Humanist and Marxist schools of historiography. Hegel asserted “universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the *end of universal history*” (Hoffmeister & Meiner, 1955:243). Edward Said mentioned that the tenuous hypothesis of Hegel’s “*universal history*” overestimated Europe and America but regarded Asia and Africa “static, despotic and irrelevant to world history” (Said, 1993:168).

### **Indian Land: A Mystery**

The Indian land for its colonizers becomes harsh and strange: neither they succeed in understanding and identifying it nor does it reveal unto them. Ronny disagrees with his mother regarding India “There’s nothing in India but the weather, my dear mother; it’s the alpha and omega of the whole affair” (62). Forster compares India with London slum: “The faint, indescribable smell” of Chandrapore’s bazars is “sweeter than a London slum, yet more disquieting” (212). The act of colonization has gnawed up India, as the result, she has become worn-out and hollow. When Aziz returns from jail, he finds in his room, “The eye-flies had colonized the top of an almeira,” and he feels that “everything in Chandrapore was used up, including the air” (250). Conversely, Ahmed Ali portrays that despite deplorable conditions the natives have not lost their sprit, enthusiasm and hope. When the rain washed up Delhi, all birds, human and animals seemed happy and gay. People went to Qutab Minar and Okhla for picnic (84).

### **The British India Provinces vis-à-vis Princely States**

The English have much political influence and power in the directly ruled British Indian Provinces as compared to the Princely States, governed by the local rajahs, raris or lords. Chandrapore, under direct British rule, and Mau state, ruled by a local rajah, bear good examples of it.

### **Conclusion:**

Ahmed Ali’s novel opens in the real and historical city of Delhi, with all its historical past and prevailing socio-political conditions during the colonial rule; whereas, Forster creates a fictional city,

Chandrapore, to develop the plot of the novel. Since, Forster's city is imaginary, therefore, he is at liberty to visualize and make variations or changes while presenting the places, because they are not real hence free from the strict observance of historical, cultural, and archeological facts. But, Ahmed Ali is bound to track the reality in all historical, political, social, cultural and geographical perspectives. When Foster chooses an imaginary city to open his novel, hence all historical, archeological details mentioned in the text cannot be, in the strict sense, correlated with real place, age, and time in sociopolitical perspective.

Ahmed Ali negates the impression of the imperial narrative that India remained backward, ahistorical and devoid of culture in past; he glorifies the historical and cultural past of India and postulates that the socio-economic and historical process was perturbed in the wake of European colonization. Whereas, Forster does not unequivocally regard India culturally, historically and economically rich. But the cities he depicts and the socio-political conditions, the natives are living with, refute all claims the British India Government made regarding the development and progress the Indian subcontinent.

For Both Foster and Ahmed Ali, India is the land of revolution, of bravery and of resilience. It can be the place of brief sojourn for the invaders but not permanent abode; it casts off everything that is foreign and alien.

Ahmed Ali presents that despite all pseudo claims of the English rulers in India, the archeological monuments, forts, mosques and tombs, which indeed were the national assets, were left to decay; the British India Government, in fact, overlooked the maintenance, renovation and preservation of these historical places; they only focused on Towers – the symbols of colonialism and imperialism – at the expenses of the real development of the local infrastructure. Besides, the British India Government left the historical buildings that were the cultural assets of the people to decay and vanish so that the memory and attachment with the past could be blotted out.

Foster's understanding of India ends with "muddle" and "mysterious", which was likely to further fog the already blurred shape of India presented in quantitatively huge and qualitatively scanty Anglo-Indian literature. He depicts India as muddle, land of strange

echoes, adverse to reason, prone to myth or superstition and immersed in strange enigmas and mysteries. It casts bleak impression on minds; there is neither movement nor evolution; in addition, everything in India is without form, organization and logic moreover at wrong places. But as one starts moving to the west everything becomes pleasant, logical, associated with reason and rationality and nature vis-à-vis art become organized, uniformed and pleasant. Thus, Forster with his entire oriental outlook mystifies and complicates the Identity of India which was already blurred by the Anglo-Indian fiction writers before Forester. Ahmed Ali makes past and present of the land clear and observable, Forster makes it mysterious, full of muddle and commotion.

India has lost its beauty, form, prosperity in the wake of colonization and everything in India has become muddle, worn-out and used-up. Forster portrays that the English have much political influence and power in the directly ruled British Indian Provinces as compared to Princely States governed by the local rajahs, ranis or lords. With Forster, India casts mystical and spiritual impact upon its visitors but her invaders encounter altogether haunted and horrific experience and vanish in gloom.

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