

Ecofeminism: The Portrayal of Women and Nature in a Passage to India

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the types of female characters in A Passage to India by E.M. Forster and reveal how nature can emerge from females' self-consciousness in the novel. With an analytic-descriptive method, this article reveals female characters' types and how women and nature link each other to emerge their self-consciousness. The data is taken from the novel "A Passage to India" by E.M. Forster. There are three types of female characters in the novel. They are stubborn and arrogant ladies represented by the British officers' wives, a warm-hearted and kind lady represented by Mrs. Moore, and acknowledgeable and enlightened young lady. Emerging the echoes in Marabar cave as one of the main triggers of incidents in the novel, Forster is trying to connect nature to awaken the main female characters' self-conscious. It deals with ecofeminism in which women and nature cannot be separated. Mrs. Moore was excited to re-evaluate social norms and interpersonal interactions while facing the natural mounds that represent the immensity of the cosmos. Meanwhile, Adela had developed into a true person. Adela's feminine consciousness was awakened by echoes of nature, allowing her to finally complete the tough transition from adolescence to adulthood. In his novel, Forster exposed Britain's failures and planned to find possible ways to transform the under developed mind into the developed one, successfully creating and portraying female characters.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Female self-consciousness

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant authors and critics in the annals of English literature of the 20th century is Edward Morgan Forster (1879–1970). Prominent literary academics and critics have given his work great praise. Forster was a prolific author who lived a long-time. During his lifetime, he only produced six complete novels: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910), *A Passage to India* (1924), and the unfinished *Maurice* (completed in 1914 but published in 1971).

Although Forster did not write frequently, he could not dispute his notable

literary accomplishments and standing in the world of English literature. Because of his keen understanding and keen observations of the social challenges of the day, Forster's writing has a unique flavour. The majority of these challenges are related to women. To portray these concerns in his writings, Forster created female characters. The portrayal of women in Forster's writing differs from that of other authors. He writes instinctively.

Female characters in Forster's writing were successfully portrayed by his distinctive writing style. He aimed to expose the terrible living conditions of women and their inferior status in patriarchal civilizations by depicting them as these female figures. He also opposed Victorian morality, which was another tactic man used to oppress women.

The 1924 novel *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster explores the influence of colonialism, the conflict between morality and spirituality, and the inevitable rise of evil. Before penning this book, Forster visited India in 1912 and served as a volunteer in Egypt during World War I. David Lean's 1984 film adaptation of the book had its world debut and received numerous Academy Award nominations. This analysis uses the Mariner Books' 75th-anniversary edition of *A Passage to India*. Some of the labels Forster used in his quotations—such as "oriental"—are today deemed unpleasant and out of date.

To begin the story, Dr. Aziz receives a summons from British physician Major Callender in the Indian city of Chandrapore. Dr. Aziz encounters an English woman in a mosque on his way home. Before they depart for their various towns, Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore strike into a meaningful chat. Mrs. Moore joins his son Ronnie, a magistrate, and his future bride Adela, who is in charge of Mrs. Moore when she returns to the club.

Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Adela want an authentic experience in India, not in the club's reconstructed British society or Anglo-Indian neighbourhood. Mr. Turton, a prominent English man stationed in Chandrapore, throws a party to introduce Mrs. Moore and Adela to the upper-class Indians whom the British associate with. At parties, the British and Indians keep a strict distance from racist motives. Still, Adela is determined to explore the cultures around her. Mr. Fielding, the principal of Government College, Mrs. Moore, Aziz, and God, a musician and Hindu mystic,

arrange for Ball to have tea at home. Over tea, Aziz and Fielding form a friendship. Burning with hospitality, Aziz invites everyone on an expedition to the legendary Marabar Caves nearby.

Adela is disappointed in Ronnie when she sees how he interacts with the citizens of Marabar. She can't imagine marrying a man as callous as him, so she decides to break off her engagement but after the two get into a car accident Adela changed her mind.

Aziz arranges a trip to the Marabar Caves. The women meet him at the train station in the morning, but Fielding and Gold ball are late and miss the train. Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela explore the cave with the help of guides and villagers. At this point, both women are disappointed in India. Mrs. Moore wants to return to England as soon as possible after Ronnie and Adela get engaged. Mrs. Moore remains at the camp while Aziz and Adela continue their caving. After Adela makes ignorant remarks about Aziz's marriage to her, Aziz leaves her to explore the caves alone. When he appears, he can see Miss Derek's car dropping Fielding off nearby, and Aziz notices that Adela is by the car, meeting Fielding at the rice field. The entire group departs and returns to Chandrapore, where Aziz is immediately arrested. When Adela was alone in the cave, she was attacked and named Aziz as her attacker. With no evidence, Aziz is locked up and a trial date is set. The British are determined to protect their image and pride by denouncing Aziz, but Fielding joins Aziz's cause. Adela's pre-trial period has been one of her fluctuating mental health and anxiety. Seeing Mrs. Moore again and hearing her talk about Aziz's innocence makes her even more unsettled. Ronnie sends his mother back to England. Rioting erupts in Chandrapore, increasing tensions between the British and Native Indians.

During the trial, Adela was pressured by the rest of the British to convict Aziz directly. She imagines the events leading up to the attack in the cave but does not see Aziz there. To the surprise of the rest of the English, she comes clean and clears Aziz. She is exiled and lives in Fielding's house for several weeks while Fielding celebrates with Aziz and her friends. Mrs. Moore died during her travels. Ronnie breaks off her engagement with Adela and sends her back to England.

Fielding and Aziz's friendship is strained and stalled after the trial of the cultural differences between them. Fielding convinces Aziz not to sue Adela and

returns to England, but Aziz plans to seek work in more remote parts of India, away from British influence. He hears from Hamidullah that Fielding has married Adela and believes Fielding betrayed him.

If we look at the story of *A Passage to India*, the incident caused by the echoes in Marabar cave is one of the climaxes of the story. In his story, Foster tries to link the women characters and nature which is dealt with ecofeminism. Ecofeminism originally grew out of feminism, which refers to women's movements that emphasize equality for women and the protection of nature. More and more scholars and experts pay attention to the increasingly serious environmental problem, which has become a theory in the ideological field.

The term ecofeminism first appeared in his 1974 published book *Le Feminismoula Mort* by French feminist Françoise Auvonne. In her book, she discussed the possibility of women starting an environmental movement to bring about new kinds of connections between men and women, men and nature. Another feminist, Janis Birkeland, described ecofeminism as a "result" of feminism that "theorizes the inter play between self, society, and nature". In short, ecofeminism focuses on the perfect integration of feminism and ecology.

By analyzing the novel from ecofeminism's perspective, this paper aims to classify types of female characters in the novel. Furthermore, this paper highlights how nature can emerge from females' self-consciousness.

METHOD

This paper is using an analytic-descriptive method to reveal the female characters' types and how women and nature link each other and how nature can emerge their self-consciousness. In order to collect the data, the writer reads the novel in detail. And then, the writer analyses deeper the female characters' types. After that, the writer tries to investigate how nature in the novel can emerge the women's self-consciousness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of female characters in *A Passage to India*

1. Stubborn and Arrogant Old Ladies

This group is mostly the older female generation who are stubborn and arrogant. While the author ostensibly criticizes these ultra-critical old ladies, in reality, the author is satirizing traditional social conventions. The representative figures are the wives of officials. They tend to espouse conservative ideas and traditional practices.

In *A Passage to India*, the wives of British officials were so arrogant that they came to India to enlighten the brutal Indians, save the natives from chaos, and restore order. They despised the Indians and considered them stupid and brutal. They were inferior to them. For example, Mrs. Leslie and Dr. Aziz's carriage of the Titons were publicly occupied, and Dr. Aziz considered their action to be a reasonable act, and the Indians should respect the British. He didn't pay or thank them for taking it for granted. The British officials' wives see the Indians as the Subaltern. The term "subaltern" in postcolonial theory refers to those from lower socioeconomic classes and other social groups who are uprooted and marginalized while also residing in an imperial colony.

To some extent, these female characters embodied Forster's concerns about traditional morals and social issues. In portraying these female figures, Forster ironically criticized the indifference and snobbery of bourgeois Englishmen. They have lost their original nature. Forster focused on mutual understanding between people of different culture and social classes.

2. A Warm-hearted and Kind Lady

The character of a warm-hearted and kind lady is represented by Mrs. Moore. She believed in Christianity and was the ideal and perfect woman for Forster. She was a socially responsible person. There was a stark contrast between her son and her. She was smart, sensitive, tolerant, and kind, but her son was violent and ruthless. As soon as she came to India, she sharply criticized and pointed out her son's bad behaviour towards Indians. She told her son to keep in mind why the British came to India, which is to search for happiness. She believed that God has brought humans into this world to make all ethnic groups more peaceful and harmonious. She hated the British, who looked down on Indians, and despised British officials who showed contempt and superiority towards local Indian women.

Mrs. Moore was a keen observer of people and things and did everything according to his conscience. When she communicated with the Indians, no prejudice against them was observed. On the contrary, she was able to develop friendly friendships with the local people of India. For this reason, she agreed with her idea that her daughter-in-law Adela visit the Marabar Caves. She won her doctor's respect by following her Native American principle of removing her shoes when entering her temple. She formed a deep friendship with Aziz in India because she believed that harmonious relationships were an effective way to solve some social problems. At the same time, with an honest attitude toward life, she rejected Dr. Aziz's ridiculous accusations. She claims Aziz is innocent and she tells Adela that she plans to see the Doctor. She misunderstands Aziz and should be aware of her prejudices against Indians. On her way back to England, all her locals called her name to thank her for her kindness, her generosity, and her goodwill. She was considered the benefactor of the Indians, and her appearance was a kind of deification. Mrs. Moore emphasized that true relationships between people should be based on mutual communication and understanding, and sought to find effective avenues of cooperation and coexistence.

Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz symbolize the union of different classes, whether upper, middle, or lower class. In Forster's eyes, everyone was equal. He firmly believed that his subordinate women could also deconstruct unfair patriarchal ideologies. Through the existence of this warm-hearted and kind lady, Forster is trying to present the concept of "Hybridity". Homi K. Bhaba's philosophy of post colonialism revolves around the idea of hybridity. According to him, hybridity can be thought of as a "third space" where colonizer and colonized power dynamics are subverted through the negotiation of cultural identity.

3. Knowledgeable and Enlightened Young Lady

Another category of women in Forster's work is knowledgeable, intelligent, and enlightened young women. Forster said this woman had become highly educated, knowledgeable, and smart. Adela Quested is the figure.

Adela in *A Passage to India* was also the kind of girl who was educated and able to correct her own mistakes. In the eyes of the reader, she was even a little naive, but the Marabar Cave incident gave her an unprecedented experience of self-healing.

She realized her mistake and was able to face it honestly, going deep into analysing her fiancée and the causes of her break up and her broken engagement.

How Nature Emerge Females' Self-Consciousness

One of the main plots of the story happens in Marabar Cave. When Dr. Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela entered the first cave, the first incident happened. Mrs. Moore “did not know who touched her, could not breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad” and “the naked pad was a poor little baby, a stride its mother’s hip” Upon entering the Marabar Cave, which symbolizes nature, both Mrs. Moore and Adela are hysterical to varying degrees, but nothing happens to Aziz and the other men. At that moment, the two British women suddenly felt a long-dormant confidence awaken: “The walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished” to resemble “a mirror inlaid with lovely colours”. These two beautifully polished mirrors help these two British women see a better version of themselves. Mrs. Moore automatically thinks 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”. She is thrilled to rethink human conventions and relationships while tackling them sounds of nature that symbolize the vastness of the universe.

The same as Mrs. Moore, Adela has experienced an ideological struggle caused by the echoes emanating from the cave, and her long-dormant sense of self has finally awakened. Adela has little experience in her life and she always harbours illusions in her head. She comes to India only to satisfy her curiosity to see the real India. However, her special position in this novel puts her in a dangerous situation simply because she belongs to the so-called upper white race and possibly the inferior female sex. In addition, she was born into the middle class in England and received a formal liberal education. On the other hand, she is "just" a woman and is discriminated against in a patriarchal society. Such a dilemma puts them in a contradictory situation. New to India, she finds the colonizers arrogant, despicable, hypocritical, and full of racial prejudices against the colonized people with great disgust. But she can't shake off her higher consciousness that she's also a colonist. She also has an unrealistic view of marriage, wanting to remain independent and dignified

while also wanting security. She is often in a confused state of mind, as is better illustrated by the engagement Ronny.

Nevertheless, after participating in the Marabar Cave Expedition sponsored by Aziz, her self-contradiction increased, and eventually, her feminine consciousness was awakened by the stone. She finally could say, "I am alive." From that moment on, she starts questioning her marriage to Ronnie. She said, "What is love? ... She and Ronnie –no, they didn't love each other." I felt like, don't love the man you marry! She concludes by stating that between her and Ronnie there is "nothing but twilight animal contact, but the emotion that binds them together". The sudden awakening of her feminine consciousness was due to terrifying hallucinations caused by constant echoes from the cave. Mrs. Quested mistakenly believes Aziz to be the man who tried to rape her in the cave. Misleading the Anglo-Indians, she denounces Aziz, leading directly to the "Cave Event". In court, Adela was initially forced to say words made up by the colony's male officials, as she was unable to speak the truth. But when she musters up her courage and tells her truth, her independent and self-aware existence is established. Ultimately, she not only saves Aziz, but she saves herself by dropping the charges against Aziz. Forster characterizes nature as an uncontrollable superpower that humans cannot control. As a woman, Adela is the first to put forward the idea of an irresistible supernatural force that brought her to the climax of her mental crisis.

She finally realizes that it was an irresistible supernatural echo, a roar in her ear that lured her into taking action against Aziz. "The Cave Event" makes her realize that having a built-in self-status is what she craves. When she returns to England, she sheds her identity as a colonist and becomes a truly independent woman. "She is perfectly genuine and very brave. When she saw she was wrong, she pulled herself up with a jerk and said no. All her friends around her, the entire British Raj pushing her forward. She stops and sends the whole thing to smithereens. She became a national heroine".

After the charges against Aziz are dropped, Adela and Fielding meet for the first time at Fielding's apartment. Adela provides a detailed analysis of the frustration she experienced during her trip to India and finally tells Fielding that it must have been a hallucination that upset her in the dark and stuffy cave. I am brave enough to

confess. Before leaving India, she realized her vanity and weakness and realized that she had done nothing for society. She planned to start living. Adela will become an independent woman, both mentally and physically. She was raised while traveling to India. She no longer examined her life, but she was examined by it. She had become a real person". Echoes representing nature awakened Adela's feminine consciousness, going through the difficult process of going from immature girlhood to maturity, finally building an intact identity, and becoming spiritually and physically mature.

CONCLUSION

A detailed analysis of these female figures in his work reveals Forster to be a highly socially responsible person. He advocated an honest, free, and passionate lifestyle, and argued that we should not be bound by the conventions and morals of society. Forster despised these vile English gentlemen and criticized their arrogant and arrogant lifestyle in his works. In his novels, Forster exposed the failures of the British and planned to find possible ways to transform undeveloped minds into developed ones. Female characters have been successfully created and depicted. He hopes that, after reading his novels during this period, the British people will find their prejudices, snobbery, and hypocrisy, and will finally be able to right their wrongs and make themselves better. Forster saw these female characters as catalysts that could help the British understand wrong behaviour, get rid of traditional notions and get them on the right track. Besides, Forster has succeeded correlate nature to his female characters.

We can also easily conclude that E.M. Forster has a contradictory attitude toward women. For one thing, Forster himself expressed a deep concern about women's emancipation. With the help of the echoes in Marabar cave, Mrs. Moore and Adela quested, as the main female characters in the novel, finally aware of their consciousness. They became brave to express what is right and wrong according to them. From this novel, Forster also tries to teach the readers that women should have equal status and rights in society.

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